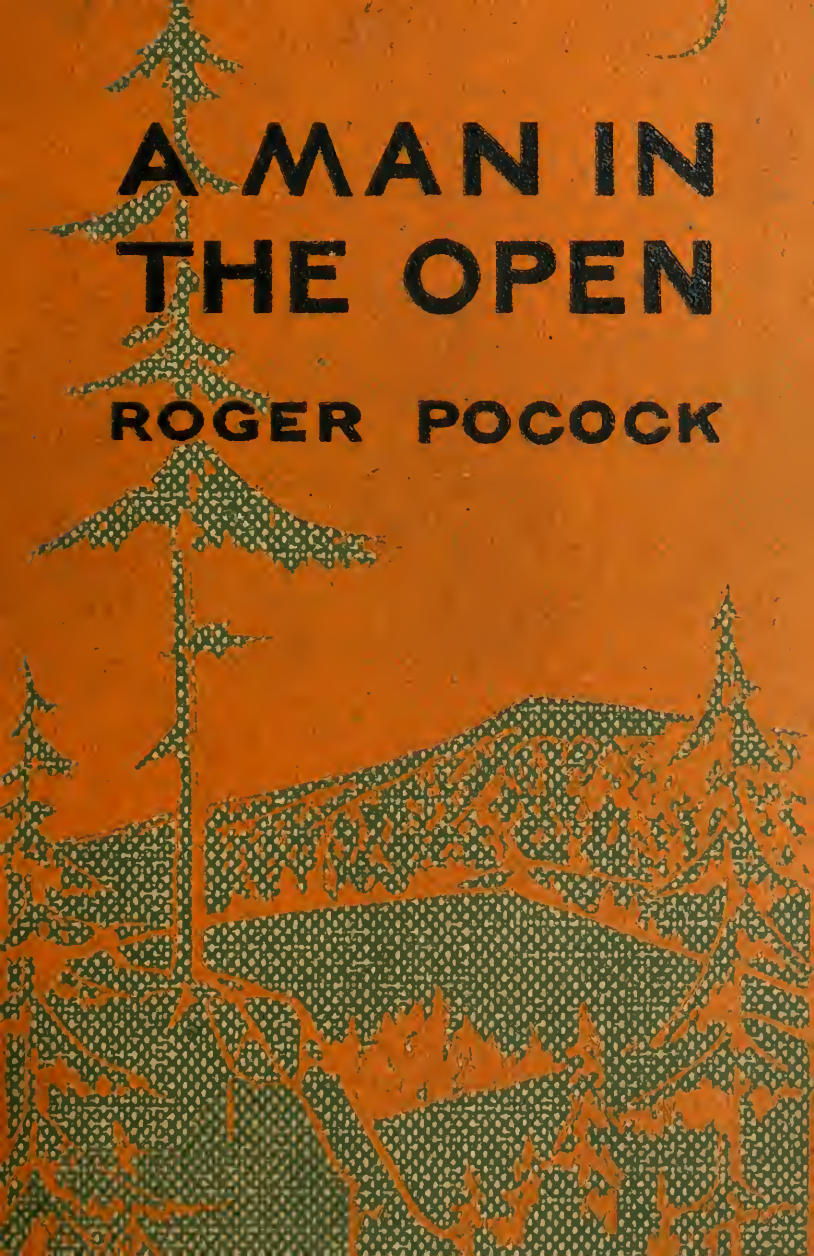
A MAN IN THE OPEN

ROGER POCOCK



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By

ROGER POCOCK

Illustrated by

M. LEONE BRACKER

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CONTENTS

PART I

CHAPTER		PAGE
I	On the Labrador	1
II	The Happy Ship	18
III	Youth	36
IV	The Ordeal by Torture	47
V	The Burning Bush	67

PART II

I	Two Ships at Anchor	75
II	The Trevor Accident	90
III	Love	107
IV	The Landlord	118
V	The Illustrious Salvator	130
VI	Robbery-Under-Arms	144
VII	The Round-Up	155
VIII	The Stampede	165
IX	The Untruthful Prisoner	178
X	Breaking the Statutes	190
XI	Billy O'Flynn	203
XII	Expounding the Scriptures	210
XIII	Nativity	225
XIV	The Locked House	236

PART III

I	Spite House	253
II	The Impatient Chapter	277
III	Rescue	290
IV	At Hundred Mile House	298
V	The Cargador	316
VI	The Black Night	334
	Epilogue	349

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TO PERSONS WHO HAVE NAMESAKES IN THIS BOOK

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

Except the Bear, who is no more, the characters appearing in this volume wish me to say that their breaches of etiquette, homicides, etc., are all original sins. Their infirmities of body, soul, and spirit are their own, not mimicry of yours, not a caricature of your friend, your acquaintance, of your second-hand acquaintance, or anybody you have heard about, or even of some mere celebrity. If we hold up a mirror, it is to human nature, not to you.

The characters wish me to tell you that they are all Imaginary Persons, and therefore very sensitive. The persons of a drama are protected by footlights, by the stage doorkeeper, not to mention grease paint and scalps by an eminent artiste; but the characters in a novel are thrust defenseless into a rude world, with many reporters about. In a page fright, worse even than stage fright, their only comfort is that absence of body which is their alternative to your great gift,—presence of mind.

So they make their bow under assumed names. There we come to the point. The proper names were all dealt out to worldly grasping persons, and not one was left unclaimed. The name department is like a cloak-room when the guests have departed, a train from which all passengers have alighted, an office on Christmas day. Can you blame the characters in fiction who come after you, if they assume the noblest names, such as Smith, and try to be worthy of their borrowed

plumes? Surely you would not have them wear a numeral such as the number of your house, or telephone.

The chances are that they give you no offense. Suppose that gentlemen named Jesse Smith number one in each million of English-speaking people, there would be one hundred in North America, half of them adults, with a moiety in wedlock, and, of these twenty-five, a hundredth part may be stockmen, of whom say one per cent. have a flaw in their claim to wedlock. To this residuum, the .0025 part of a perfect gentleman, whom he has not the honor to know personally, our Mr. Smith tenders profound apologies.

But the Persons of the book, dear friends, who have filled two years of my life with happiness, are not only Imaginary People with assumed names, but they inhabit a district at variance with the maps, at a period not shown in earthly calendars. So far aloof from the world where they might give offense to earthly readers, they are outside the bounds of space and time, and belong to that realm of Art where there is but one law, whereby they stand or fall, must live or die—fidelity to Life.

Your obedient servant,

THE AUTHOR.

A MAN IN THE OPEN

PART I

A MAN IN THE OPEN

CHAPTER I

ON THE LABRADOR

Dictated by Mr. Jesse Smith

DON'T you write anything down yet, 'cause I ain't ready.

If I wrote this yarn myself, I'd make it good and red from tip to tip, claws out, teeth bare, fur crawling with emotions. It wouldn't be dull, no, or evidence.

But then it's to please you, and that's what I'm for.

So I proceeds to stroke the fur smooth, lay the paws down soft, fold up the smile, and purr. A sort of truthfulness steals over me. Goin' to be dull, too.

No, I dunno how to begin. If this yarn was a rope, I'd coil it down before I begun to pay out. You lays the end, so, and flemish down, ring by ring until the bight's coiled, smooth, ready to flake off as it runs. I delayed a lynching once to do just that,

and relieve the patient's mind. It all went off so well!

When we kids were good, mother she used to own we came of pedigree stock; but when we're bad, seems we took after father. You see mother's folk was the elect, sort of born saved. They allowed there'd be room in Heaven for one hundred and forty-four thousand just persons, mostly from Nova Scotia, but when they took to sorting the neighbors, they'd get exclusive. The McGees were all right until Aunt Jane McGee up and married a venerable archdeacon, due to burn sure as a bishop. The Todds were through to glory, with doubts on Uncle Simon, who'd been a whaler captain until he found grace and opened a dry-goods store. Seeing he died in grace, worth all of ten thousand dollars, the heirs concluded the Lord should act reasonable, until they found uncle had left his wealth to charities. Then they put a text on his tomb—"For he had great possessions."

The McAndrewses has corner lots in the New Jerusalem, and is surely the standard of morals until Cousin Abner went shiftless and wrote poems. They'd allus been so durned respectable, too.

Anyway, mother's folk as a tribe, is millionaires in grace and pretty well fixed in Nova Scotia. She'd talk like a book, too. You'd never suspect mother, playing the harmonium in church, with a tuning-fork to sharpen the preacher's voice, black boots, white socks, box-plaited crinoline, touch-me-not frills, poke bonnet, served all round with scratch-the-kisser roses. Yes, I seen the daguerreotype, work of a converted photographer—nothing to pay. Thar's mother—full suit of sail, rated a hundred A-one at Lloyd's, the most important sheep in the Lord's flock. Then she's found out, secretly married among the goats. Her name's scratched out of the family Bible, with a strong hint to the Lord to scratch her entry from the Book of Life. She's married a sailorman before the mast, a Liveyere from the Labrador, a man without a dollar, suspected of being Episcopalian. Why, she'd been engaged to the leading grocery in Pugwash. Oh, great is the fall thereof, and her name ain't alluded to no more. "The ways of the Lord," says she, "is surely wonderful."

In them days the Labrador ain't laid out exactly to suit mother. She's used to luxury—coal in the lean-to, taties in the cellar, cows in the barn, barter

store round the corner, mails, church, school, and a jail right handy, so she can enjoy the ungodly getting their just deserts. But in our time the Labrador was just God's country, all rocks, ice, and sea, to put the fear into proud hearts—no need of teachers. It kills off the weaklings—no need of doctors. A school to raise men—no need of preachers. The law was "work or starve"—no place for lawyers. It's police, and court, and hangman all complete, fire and hail, snow and vapors, wind and storm fulfilling His word. Nowadays I reckon there'd be a cinematograph theater down street to distract your attention from facts, and you'd order molasses by wireless, invoiced C. O. D. to Torngak, Lab. Can't I hear mother's voice acrost the years, and the continents, as she reads the lesson: " 'He casteth forth His ice like morsels: who can stand before His cold?' "

Father's home was an overturned schooner, turfed in, and he was surely proud of having a bigger place than any other Liveyere on the coast. There was the hold overhead for stowing winter fish, and room down-stairs for the family, the team of seven husky dogs, and even a cord or two of fire-wood. We kids used to play at Newf'nlanders up in the hold, when

the winter storms were tearing the tops off the hills, and the Eskimo devil howled blue shrieks outside. The huskies makes wolf songs all about the fewness of fish, and we'd hear mother give father a piece of her mind. That's about the first I remember, but all what mother thought about poor father took years and years to say.

I used to be kind of sorry for father. You see he worked the bones through his hide, furring all winter and fishing summers, and what he earned he'd get in truck from the company. All us Liveyeres owed to the Hudson Bay, but father worked hardest, and he owed most, hundreds and hundreds of skins. The company trusted him. There wasn't a man on the coast more trusted than he was, with mother to feed, and six kids, besides seven huskies, and father's aunt, Thessalonika, a widow with four children and a tumor, living down to Last Hope beyond the Rocks. Father's always in the wrong, and chews black plug baccy to keep his mouth from defending his errors. "B'y," he said once, when mother went out to say a few words to the huskies; "I'd a kettle once as couldn't let out steam—went off and broke my arm. If yore mother ever gets silent, run, b'y, run!"

I whispered to him, "You don't mind?"

He grinned. "It's sort of comforting outside. We don't know what the winds and the waves is saying. If they talked English, I'd—I'd turn pitman and hew coal, b'y, as they does down Nova Scotia way—where yore mother come from."

There was secrets about father, and if she ever found out! You see, he looked like a white man, curly yaller hair same as me, and he was fearful strong. But in his inside—don't ever tell!—he was partly small boy same's me, and the other half of him—don't ever let on!—was mountaineer injun. I seen his three brothers, the finest fellers you ever—yes, Scotch half-breeds—and mother never knew. "Jesse," he'd whisper, "swear you'll never tell?"

"S'elp me Bob."

"It would be hell, b'y."

"What's hell like?"

"Prayers and bein' scrubbed, forever an' ever."

"But mother won't be there?"

"Why, no. It hain't so bad as all that. She'll be in Heaven, making them angels respectable, and cleaning apostles. They was fishermen, too. They'll catch it!"

Thar's me on father's knee, with my nose in his

buckskin shirt, and even to this day the wood smoke in camp brings back that wuff, whereas summers his boots smelt fishy. What happened first or afterwards is all mixed up, but there's the smoke smell and sister Maggie lying in the bunk, all white and froze.

There's fish smell, and Polly who used to wallop me with a slipper, lying white and froze. And yet I knew she couldn't get froze in summer.

Then there's smoke smell, and big Tommy, bigger nor father, throwing up blood. I said he'd catch it from mother for messing the floor, but father just hugged me, telling me to shut up. I axed him if Tommy was going to get froze, too. Then father told me that Tommy was going away to where the milk came out of a cow. You just shove the can opener into the cow so—and the milk pours out, whole candy pails of milk. Then there's great big bird rocks where the hens come to breed, and they lays fresh eggs, real fresh hen's eggs—rocks all white with eggs. And there's vegi tables, which is green things to eat. First time you swell up and pretty nigh bust, but you soon get used to greens. Tommy is going to Civili Zation. It's months and months off, and when you

get there, the people is so awful mean they'd let a stranger starve to death without so much as "Come in." The men wear pants right down to their heels, and as to the women—

Mother comes in and looks at father, so he forgets to say about the women at Civili Zation, but other times he'd tell, oh, lots of stories. He said it was worse for the likes of us than New Jerusalem.

I reckon Tommy died, and Joan, too, and mother would get gaunt and dry, rocking herself. "'The Lord gave,'" she'd say, "'and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.'"

There was only Pete and me left, and father wagging his pipe acrost the stove at mother. "They'll die, ma'am," I heard him say, and she just sniffed. "If I hadn't taken 'em out doors they'd be dead now, ma'am."

She called him an injun. She called him—I dunno what she didn't call him. I'd been asleep, and when I woke up she was cooking breakfast while she called him a lot more things she must have forgot to say. But he carried me in his arms out through the little low door, and it was stabbing cold with a blaze of northern lights.

He tucked me up warm on the komatik, he hitched

up the huskies, and mushed, way up the tickle, and through the soft bush snow, and at sunup we made his winter tilt on Torngak Creek. We put in the winter there, furring, and every time he came home from the round of traps, he'd sell me all the pelts. I was the company, so he ran up a heap of debt. Then he made me little small snow-shoes and skin clothes like his, and a real beaver cap with a tail. I was surely proud when he took me hunting fur and partridges. I was with him to the fishing, in the fall we'd hunt, all winter we'd trap till it was time for the sealing, and only two or three times in a year we'd be back to mother. We'd build her a stand-up wigwam of firewood, so it wouldn't be lost in the snow, we'd tote her grub from the fort, the loads of fish, and the fall salmon.

Then I'd see Pete, too, who'd got pink, with a spitting cough. He wanted to play with me, but I wouldn't. I just couldn't. I hated to be anywheres near him.

"Didn't I tell yez?" father would point at Pete coughing. "Didn't I warn yez?"

But mother set her mouth in a thin line.

"Pete," said she, "is saved."

Next time we come mother was all alone.

"'The Lord gave,'" she says, "'and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord,' but it's getting kind of monotonous."

She hadn't much to say then, she didn't seem to care, but was just numb. He wrapped her up warm on the komatik, with just a sack of clothes, her Bible, and the album of photos from Nova Scotia, yes, and the china dogs she carried in her arms. Father broke the trail ahead, I took the gee pole, and when day came, we made the winter tilt. There mother kep' house just as she would at home, so clean we was almost scared to step indoors. We never had such grub, but she wouldn't put us in the wrong or set up nights confessing father's sins. She didn't care any more.

It was along in March or maybe April that father was away in coarse weather, making the round of his traps. He didn't come back. There'd been a blizzard, a wolf-howling hurricane, blowing out a lane of bare ground round the back of the cabin, while the big drift piled higher and packed harder, until the comb of it grew out above our roof like a sea breaker, froze so you could walk on the overhang. And just between dark and duckish father's husky team came back without him.

I don't reckon I was more'n ten or eleven years old, but you see, this Labrador is kind of serious with us, and makes even kids act responsible. Go easy, and there's famine, freezing, blackleg, all sorts of reasons against laziness. It sort of educates.

Mother was worse than silent. There was something about her that scared me more than anything outdoors. In the morning her eye kep' following me as if to say, "Go find your father." Surely it was up to me, and if I wasn't big enough to drive the huskies or pack father's gun, I thought I could manage afoot to tote his four-pound ax. She beckoned me to her and kissed me—just that once in ten years, and I was quick through the door, out of reach, lest she should see me mighty near to cryin'.

It was all very well showing off brave before mother, but when I got outside, any excuse would have been enough for going back. I wished I'd left the matches behind, but I hadn't. I wished the snow would be too soft, but it was hard as sand. I wished I wasn't a coward, and the bush didn't look so wolfy, and what if I met up with the Eskimo devil! Oh, I was surely the scaredest lil' boy, and dead certain I'd get lost. There was nobody to see if I sat down and cried under father's lob-stick, but I was too

durned frightened, because the upper branches looked like arms with claws. Then I went on because I was going, and there was father's trail blazed on past Bake-apple Marsh. The little trees, a cut here, a slash there, the top of a tree lopped and hanging, then Big Boulder, Johnny Boulder, Small Boulder, cross the crick, first deadfall, more lops, a number-one trap empty—how well I remember even now. The way was as plain as streets, and the sun shining warm as he looked over into the valley.

Then I saw a man's mitt, an old buckskin mitt sticking up out of the snow. Father had dropped his mitt, and without that his hand would be froze. When I found him, how glad he'd be to get it!

But when I tried to pick it up, it was heavy. Then it came away, and there was father's hand sticking up. It was dead.

Of course I know I'd ought to have dug down through the snow, but I didn't. I ran for all I was worth. Then I got out of breath and come back shamed.

It wasn't for love of father. No. I hated to touch that hand, and when I did I was sick. Still that was better than being scared to touch. It's not so bad when you dare.

I dug, with a snow-shoe for a shovel. There was the buckskin shirt smelling good, and the long fringes I'd used to tickle his nose with—then I found his face. I just couldn't bear that, but turned my back and dug until I came to the great, big, number-four trap he used for wolf and beaver. He must have stepped without seeing it under the snow, and it broke his leg. Then he'd tried to drag himself back home.

It was when I stood up to get breath and cool off that I first seen the wolf, setting peaceful, waggin' his tail. First I thought he was one of our own huskies, but when he didn't know his name I saw for sure he must be the wolf who lived up Two Mile Crick. Wolves know they're scarce, with expensive pelts, so neither father nor me had seen more'n this person's tracks. He'd got poor inspecting father's business instead of minding his own. That's why he was called the Inspector. It was March, too, the moon of famine. Of course I threw my ax and missed. His hungry smile's still thar behind a bush, and me wondering whether his business is with me or father. That's why I stepped on the snow-shoes, and went right past where he was, not daring to get my ax. Yes, it was me he wanted to see—first, but of

course I wasn't going to encourage any animal into thinking he'd scared a man. Why, he'd scarce have let father even see his tracks for fear they'd be trapped or shot. So I walked slow and proud, leadin' him off from father—at least I played that, wishing all the time that mother's lil' boy was to home. After a while I grabbed down a lopped stick where father'd blazed, not as fierce as an ax, but enough to make me more or less respected.

Sometimes the Inspector was down wind 'specting my smell, times he was up wind for a bird's-eye view, or again on my tracks to see how small they looked—and oh, they did feel small!

From what I've learned among these people, wolves is kind to man cubs, gentle and friendly even when pinched with hunger, just loving to watch a child and its queer ways. They're shy of man because his will is strong compelling them, and his weapons magic. So they respects his traps, his kids, an' all belonging to him. Only dying of hunger, they'll snatch his dogs and cats, and little pigs, but they ain't known to hurt man or his young.

The Inspector was bigger than me, stronger 'n any man, swifter 'n any horse. I tell yer the maned

white wolf is wiser'n most people, and but for eating his cubs, he's nature's gentleman.

The trouble was not him hunting, but me scared. Why, if he'd wanted me, one flash, one bite, and I'm breakfast. It was just curiosity made him so close behind like a stealthy ghost. When I'd turn to show fight, he'd seem to apologize, and then I'd go on whistling a hymn.

Thar he was cached right ahead in the deadfall, for a front view, if I'd known. But I thrashed with my stick in a panic, hitting his snout, so he yelped. Then he lost his temper. He'd a "sorry, but-business-is-business" expression on him. I ran at him, tripped on a stump, let out a yell, and he lep' straight at my throat.

And in the middle of that came a gunshot, a bullet grazed my arm, and went on whining. Another shot, and the Inspector ran. Then I was rubbing whar the bullet hurt, sort of sulky, too, with a grievance, when I was suddenly grabbed and nigh smothered in mother's arms. She'd come with the team of huskies followin' me; she'd been gunning, too, and I sure had a mighty close call.

She'd no tears left for father, so when I got through sobbin' we went to the body, and loaded it

in the komatik for home. Thar's things I don't like to tell you.

It wasn't a nice trip exactly, with the Inspector superintending around. When we got back to the tilt, we daresn't take out the huskies, or unload, or even stop for grub. We had to drive straight on, mother and me, down the tickle, past our old empty home, then up the Baccalieu all night.

The sun was just clear of the ice when we made the Post, and we saw a little ball jerk up the flag halyards, then break to a great red flag with the letters H. B. C. It means Here Before Christ.

The air was full of a big noise, like the skirl of sea-gulls screaming in a gale, and there was Mr. McTavish on the sidewalk, marching with his bagpipes to wake the folk out of their Sunday beds. He'd pants down to his heels, just as father said, and fat bacon to eat every day of his life. He was strong as a team of bullocks, a big, bonny, red man, with white teeth when he turned, smiling, in a sudden silence of the pipes. Then he saw father's body, with legs and arms stiffened all ways, and the number-four trap still gripped on broken bones. Off came his fur cap.

Mother stood, iron-hard, beside the komatik.

"Factor," says she, "I've come to pay his debt."

"Nay, it's the Sabbath, ma'am. Ye'll pay no debts till Monday. Come in and have some tea—ye puir thing."

"You starved his soul to death, and now I've brought his body to square his debts. Will you leave *that* here till Monday?"

Mr. McTavish looked at her, then whispered to me. "B'y," said he, "we must make her cry or she'll be raving mad. Greet, woman, greet. By God, I'll make ye greet!"

He marched up and down the sidewalk, and through the skirl of gulls in a storm, swept a tune that made the meat shake on my bones.

Once mother shrieked out, trying to make him stop, but he went on pacing in front of her, to and fro, with his eyes on her all the time, peering straight through her, and all the grief of all the world in the skirl and the wail, and that hopeless awful tune. She covered her face with her hands, trying to hold while the great sobs shook her, and she reeled like a tree in a gale, until she fell on her knees, until she threw herself on the corpse, and cried, and cried.

CHAPTER II

THE HAPPY SHIP

CAP'N MOSE of the *Zedekiah W. Baggs* 'e was a Sunday Christian. All up along 'e'd wear a silk hat, the only one on the Labrador. Yes. Sundays 'e'd be ashore talkin' predestination an' grace out of a book 'e kep' in 'is berth, but never a word about fish or the state of the ice. Mother'd been raised to a belief in Christians, so when Mose dropped in at her shack, admirin' how she cooked, she'd be pleased all up the back, and have him right in to dinner. He'd kiss me, talkin' soft about little children. Yes. That's how 'e got me away to sea as boy on a sealin' voyage, without paying me any wages.

Mother never knew what Cap'n Mose was like on week-days, and Sunday didn't happen aboard of the *Zedekiah.* I remember hidin' away at the back of Ole Oleson's bunk, axing God please to turn me into an animal. Any sort would do, because I seen men kind to animals. You know an animal mostly con-

sists of a pure heart, and four legs, which is a great advantage. Queer world though, if all our prayers was granted.

Belay thar. A man sets out to tell adventures, and if his victims don't find some excuse for getting absent, he owes them all the happiness he's got. It's mean to hand out sorrow to persons bearing their full share already. So we proceeds to the night when I ran from the *Zedekiah,* and joined the *Happy Ship.*

We lay in the big ice pack off Cape Breton, getting a load of seal pelts. All hands was out on the ice while daylight lasted, clubbing seals, gathering the carcasses into pans, sculping, then towing the hides aboard to salt 'em down.

We got our supper, then turned in, bone-weary, but the ship groaned so that I daresn't sleep. A ship ain't got no mouth to give her age away, and yet with ships and women it's pretty much the same, for the younger they are the less they need to be painted. The *Zedekiah* was old, just paint an' punk, and she did surely groan to the thrust of the pack. I was too scared to sleep, so I went up on deck.

I'd allus watched for a chance to run away, and thar was Jim, the anchor-watch, squatting on the

bitts dead asleep. He used to be that way when nobody chased him.

I daresn't make for the coast. You see I'd heard tell of niggers ashore which eat boys who run away. But I seen the lights of the three-masted schooner a couple of miles to windward. I grabbed a sealing gaff and slid down on to the ice.

First, as the pans rocked under me, I was scary, next I warmed up, gettin' venturesome, until I came near sliding into the wet, and after that I'd look before I lep'. There'd been a tops'l breeze from the norrard, blowin' up since nightfall to a hurricane, and then it blew some more, until I couldn't pole-jump for fear of being blowed away. With any other ship, I'd have wished myself back on board.

You know how the grinding piles an edge around each pan, of broken splinters? That edge shone white agin the black of the water, all the guide I had. But times the squalls of wind was like scythes edged with sleet, so I was blinded, waiting, freezing until a lull came, and I'd get on. It was broad day, and I reckon each step weighed a ton before I made that schooner.

A gray man, fat, with a chin whisker, lifted me in overside. "Come far?" says he, and I turned round

to show him the *Zedekiah*. She wasn't there. She was gone—foundered.

So that's how I came aboard of the *Happy Ship,* just like a lil' lost dog, with no room in my skin for more'n bones and famine. Captain Smith used to say he'd signed me on as family ghost; but he paid me honest wages, fed me honest grub, while as to clothes and bed, I was snug as a little rabbit. He taught me reading and writing, and punctuation with his belt, sums, hand, reef, and steer, catechism, knots and splices, sewing, squeegee, rule of the road, soojie moojie, psalms of David, constitution of the United States, and playing the trombone, with three pills and a good licking regular Saturday nights. Mother's little boy began to set up and take notice.

Then five years in the *Pawtucket* all along, from Montreal to Colon, from banjos plunking in them *portales* of Vera Cruz, to bugles crying revally in Quebec, and the oyster boats asleep by old Point Comfort, and the Gloucester fleet a-storming home past Sable, and dagos basking on Havana quays. Suck oranges in the dinghy under the moonlight, waiting to help the old man aboard when he's drunk; watch the niggers humping cotton into a tramp at Norfolk; feel the tide-rip snoring up past Tantra-

mar; reef home trys'ls when she's coming on to blow, with the Keys to lee'ard; can't I just *feel* the old *Pawnticket* romping home to be in time for Christmas!

Did you hear tell that the sea has feelings—the cryin', the laugh, dumb sorrow, blazin' wrath, the peace, the weariness, the mother-kindness, the hush like prayers of something which ain't brute, or human, but more'n human, so grand and awful you hardly dare to breathe?

Words, only words which don't fit, the misfits which make fun of serious thoughts. We men is dumb beasts which can't say what we mean, whereas I've allus reckoned persons like cats and wolves don't feel so much emotions as they exudes in song.

Seafaring men is sea-wise, sea-kind, only land-foolish, for there's things no sailorman knows how to say, things even landsmen can't figure out in dollars and cents.

Seems I'm a point off my course? I'm only saying things the captain said, times on a serious night when we'd be up some creek for fish, or layin' low for ducks. If ever he went ashore without me, I'd be like a lost dog, and he drunk before the sun was over the yard-arm. But away together it wasn't master

and boy, but just father and son. He'd even named me after himself, and that's why my name's Smith.

I disremember which port—somewheres up the St. Lawrence where we loaded lumber for the Gulf o' Mexico, but the captain and me was away fishing. Mother had come from the Labrador to find me, old gray mother. They dumped her seal-hide trunk on our wharf, so one of the china dogs inside got split from nose to tail; but mother just sat on a bollard, and didn't give a damn. She put on her round horn spectacles to smile at the mate aft, and the second mate forward, the or'nary seaman painting in the name board, and Bill in his bos'n's chair a-tarring down the rigging, and the bumboat laundress who'd been tearing the old man's shirt-fronts. Yes, she'd a smile for every man jack that seemed to warm their hearts, but nary a word to interfere with work, for she just sat happy at the sight of the *Pawnticket,* and she surely admired everything, from Old Glory to Blue Peter—until our nigger cook came and spilled slops overside. Seems he'd had news of the lady, and came to grin, but he was back in his galley, like a rabbit to his burrow, while she marched up the gangway. "Can't abide dirt," says mother, and even the new boy heard not a word else 'cept the splash.

For mother just escorted that nigger right through the galley, out at the other end, over the port rail, and boosted him into the blue harbor, for the first and only bath he'd ever had. Then she took off her horn spectacles, her old buckskin gloves, and her bonnet, and sot to cleaning a galley which hadn't been washed since the days of President Lincoln. Floor, range, walls, beams, pots, kettles, plates and dishes, she washed and scrubbed and polished. She hadn't time to listen to the wet nigger or the mate, and narry a man on board could get more than yea or nay out of mother. She cooked them a supper too good to be eaten and spoilt, then set the dishes to rights, got the lamp a-shining, and axed to be shown round the ship. You should have seen the idlers aft and the boys forrard, redding up as if all their mothers was expected. As to the nigger, the fellers made a habit of pitching him overboard until he got tired of coming.

The cap'n and me comes back along with the dinghy, makes fast, and climbs aboard. There's old gray mother, with the horn specs, calm in her own kitchen, just tellin' us to set right down to supper. Cap'n lives aft, and I belongs up forrard, being ordinary seaman, and less important aboard than the ol'.

man's pig. Yet somehow mother knew, feeding us both in the galley, and standing by while we fed. Never a word, but mother had a light for Captain Smith's cigar, and her eyes looking hungry at me for fear she'd be sent ashore.

"Well, ma'am," says the captain, "sent your baggage aft? Oh, we'll soon get your baggage aboard."

Then I heard him on deck seeing mother's dunnage into the spare berth aft, and the nigger's turkey thrown out on the wharf.

Sort of strange to me remembering mother, gaunt, bitter-hard, always in the right, with lots to say. And here was little mother sobbing her heart out on the breast of my jersey. Just the same mother changed. Said she was fed up with the Labrador, coming away to see the world, meet folks, and have a good time; but would I be ashamed of having her with me at sea? Surely that had been old mother back there in the long ago time, and now it was young mother laughing just because she'd cried.

Shamed? All the ways down from Joe Beef's clear to Rimouski you'll hear that yarn to-day, of how the old sea custom of winning a berth in fair fight was practised by a lady, aboard of the *Pawn-ticket.*

You've heard of ship's husbands, but we'd the first ship's mother. And the way she crep' in was surely insidious. Good word that. Let her draw stores, you find she's steward and purser, just surely poison to the chandlers. Oh, she'll see to the washing, and before you can turn around, she's nurse and doctor. She's got to be queen, and the schooner's a sea palace, when we suddenly discovered she only signed as cook.

Now we're asleep at eleven knots on a beam wind, and Key West wide on the starboard bow, the same being in the second dog-watch when I'm invited aft. There's the old man setting in the captain's place, there's mother at the head of the table sewing, and she asks me to sit in the mate's seat as if I was chief officer instead of master's dog.

"Son," says she—queer, little, soft chuckle, "son. You'll never guess."

I'm sort of sulky at having riddles put.

Then the old man gets red to the gills, giggling. He slaps hisself on his fat knee and wriggles. Then he up and kisses mother with a big smack right on the lips.

"Can't guess?" says mother.

"I'm the old man," he giggles, "she's the old

woman." Then he reached out his paw. "Put her there, son!" says he; "what's yer name, boy?"

He'd a hand like a bear trap. "Smith!" I squealed. "Smith!"

"Fact," says he. "Fill yourself a goblet of that 'ere sherry wine, with some sugar. Drink, you cub, to Captain and Mrs. Smith. Now off with ye, and pass the bottle forrard."

There's me chuck-a-block with shyness, spluttering wine, dumb as a fish 'cause I've only one mouth to my face; then I'm to the foc'sle, tellin' the boys there's mutiny on the high seas with the cook commanding, and we're flying the aurora borealis for a flag, till we load a cargo of stars, and clears for paradise.

Next day, or next week, or maybe the Monday following, the ship's got a headache, with the sky sitting down on the mastheads, the sea like oil, the sheets slapping the shadows on the deck, where the tar boils, and our feet is like overdone toast.

We sailors is off our feed, and Pierre Legrandeur telling his beads till they get pitched overboard for luck. Old man's in a stinking temper, mother abed with sick headache, first mate like a wounded seal, the second has a touch of the sun, and bo's'n got a

water-pup on his neck. We stows every stitch of canvas, sets a storm stays'l reefed to the size of a towel, everything on deck's lashed solid, and the glass is lookin' sicker'n ever. Then dad says we'd best take precautions, so he tries to house the topmasts, and sends down for a drum of oil.

The sky's like copper edged with sheet lightning, then there's scud in a hurry overhead, the horizon folding in, and a funnel-shaped cloud to the southard wrapping up the sky. There's no air, and I noticed the binnacle alight, so it must have been nigh dark under that funnel cloud. Just as it struck, some one called out "All aboard!" and I heard the mate yell, "You mean, all overboard!"

Couldn't see much at first, as I was busy getting mother out of the drowned cabin. When I'd passed a halyard round her and the stump of the mizzen, I'd just breathing time. The sea was flattened, white under black sky, and what was left of us was mostly blowing about. I felt sorry for Pierre—gone after his rosary beads, and Mick, too—he'd owed me a dollar. I missed the masts some, and the bowsprit. Galley gone, too, and the good old dinghy staved to kindlings. The ship's cat was mewing around with no curling-up corner left.

Dad was just taking command again of what remained. No use shouting either, so he hung on and beckoned. The masts overside were battering holes in us, until we cut adrift. Then to the pumps, but that was sort of *ex officio* just to keep us warm. Working's warmer than waiting.

Being timber-laden we couldn't sink, which was convenient. But, as mother said, there wasn't any grub on the roof, and we couldn't go down-stairs. For instance, we wanted a drink of water.

Well, now, we been three days refreshing our parched mouths with beer stories, when a fishing vessel comes along smelling salvage. Happens he's one of them felucca-rigged dago swine out of Invicta, Texas. Daresn't tow a hair-brush across a wash pail for fear of getting fouled in his own hawser. But he's a champion artist at gesticulations, so he'd like to get his picture in the papers for rescuing shipwrecked mariners. His charges was quite moderate, too, for a breaker of water and some fancy grub—until we seen the bill.

I never knew till then that our old man was owner. Of course that's all right, only he'd run astern with his insurance. That's why he'd stay with the ship, so it's no good talking. As to mother, she come

aboard the feluccy, ship's cat in her arms, and a sort of cold, dumb, going-to-be-good-and-it's-killin'-me sort of smile. She bore up brave until she struck the number-one smell in the dago's cabin. "It's too much," she says, handing me the cat, "too much. I'm goin' back to drown clean."

She kissed me, and went back aboard the wreck.

But I was to stay with our sailors aboard the dago, to fetch Invicta quick, and bring a tug. Dad trusted me, even to play the coward and quit him. I dread to think back on that passage of four days to the port of Invicta.

Now in them days I was fifteen, and considered homely. The mouth I got would be large for a dog, smile—six and three-quarters. Thar ashore at Invicta, I'd still look sort of cheerful, so all them tug skippers took me for a joke. It was four days and three nights since I'd slept, so I suppose I'd look funny wanting to hire a tug.

I showed power of attorney, wrote in indelible pencil on dad's old dicky cravat, but the tugs expected cash, and the agents went back on me.

There was our sailors playing shipwrecked heroes, which is invited to take refreshments, and tell how brave they'd been, raising the quotations on tugs up

to ten thousand dollars. Better have a whisky to lessen that smile before it takes cramp, they'd say. And mother's voice seems to call out of the air.

Nothin' doing Saturday nights at the office, tug crews all ashore, but the port will get a move on Monday. Trust grown men to know more'n a mere boy. Keep a stiff upper lip, cheer up and have a drink. The glass is down, the gulls is flying inland, thar's weather brewing. I seen in my mind the sprays lash over the wreck.

It was dark when I went to the wharves with Captain McGaw to see the *Pluribus Unum*. He'd show me a tug cheap at ten thousand cash—stores all complete, steam up, engineer on the premises, though he'd stepped ashore for a drink. Cute cabin he'd got on the bridge, cunning little glory-hole forrard. Why, everything was real handy, so that I only had to bat him behind the ear with a belaying-pin, and he dropped right down the fore hatch. All I wanted now was a navigating officer I could trust.

Which brings me to Mr. McMillan, our own second mate, buying a dozen fried oysters in a card box with a wire handle, all for twenty-five cents, though the girl seemed expecting a kiss.

"Hello, Frankie," says I, slapping him on the

back. A foremast hand can make his officer act real dignified with less. "Say, Mac! D'ye know what Greed done?" I grabbed his oysters. "Greed, he choke puppy," says I, and in my mind I seen the gulls wheel round the wreck, where something's lying huddled. "Come on, puppy!" says I, waving Frankie down street with them oysters, so all the traffic pauses to admire, and our second officer is running good. More things I said, escorting him maybe a mile aboard of the *Pluribus Unum*. And there I ate them oysters while he was being coarse and rude, but all the time I seen the wreck heave sick and sodden on the swell of the gulf, the circling gulls, and how they dove down, pecking at a huddle of torn clothes beside the wheel.

Up thar on the tug's masthead I was owning to being in the wrong, while Frankie Mac was promising faithful to tear my hide off over my ears when I'm caught.

"Please, sir," says I, "it ain't so much the oysters worries me. It's this yer Cap'n McGaw I done embezzled. Cayn't call it kidnaped 'cause he's over sixty, but I stunned him illegal with a belaying-pin, and I hears him groaning—times when you stops to pant."

But Frankie Mac wouldn't believe one word until he went down in the fore peak to inquire, while I applied the hatch, and battened down.

So you see I'd got a tug, and the crew aboard, so the next thing was to take in the hawsers, shove off, and let her drift on the ebb.

It's a caution to see how many taps and things besets an engine-room, all of 'em heaps efficient. The first thing I handled proved up plenty steam, for my left arm was pink and blisters for a week. Next I found a tap called bilge-valve injection, which lets in the sea when you wants to sink the ship. I turned him full, and went to sit on the fore hatch while I sucked my arm, and had a chat with the crew.

They was talkative, and battering at the hatch with an ax, so I'd hardly a word in edgeways. Then they got scared we'd blow up before we drowned. Allus in my mind I'd see them gulls squawkin' around the wreck, and mother fighting them. That heaped thing by the wheel was dad, for I seen the whites of his eyes as the ship lurched him. An' the gulls—

Cap'n McGaw was pleadin' with me, then Mr. McMillan. They swore they'd take me to the wreck for nothin', they'd give their Bible oath, they'd sign

agreements. McGaw had a wife and family ashore. McMillan was in love.

I turned off the bilge-valve injection, opened the fore hatch, and set them two to work. They was quite tame, and that night I slept—only to wake up screechin' at the things I seen in dreams.

Seven days we searched for the wreck before we gave up a .d quit, at least the captains did. Then night come down black overhead, with the swell all phosphorescent. I allus think of mother in a light sea under a black sky, like it was that night, when our tug run into the wreck by accident.

I jumped first on board. The poor hulk lay flush with the swell, lifting and falling just enough to roll the thin green water, all bright specks, across and across the deck. Mother was there, her bare arm reaching out, her left hand lifting her skirt, her face looking up, dreamir g as she turned, and turned, and swayed, in a slow dance. It's what they calls a waltz, and seems, as I stood watching, I'd almost see the music swaying her as she wove circles, water of stars pouring over her bare feet. Seems though the music stopped, and she came straight to me. Speaks like a lil' small girl. "Oh, mummy," she says, "look," and draws her hands apart so, just as if she

was showing a long ribbon, "watered silk," she mutters, "only nine cents a yard. Oh, mayn't I, mayn't I, mummy?"

And there was dad, with all that water of stars washing across and across him.

CHAPTER III

YOUTH

A DOG sets down in his skin, tail handy for wagging—all his possessions right thar.

Same with me, setting on the beach, with a cap, jersey, overalls, sea boots, paper bag of peanuts, beached wreck of the old *Pawnticket* in front, and them two graves astern. Got more'n a dog has to think about, more to remember, nothin' to wag. Two days I been there, and the peanuts is getting few. Little gray mother, dad, the *Happy Ship,* just dead, that's all, dead. The tide makes and ebbs, the wind comes and goes, there's days, nights and the little waves beating time—time—time, just as if they cared, which they don't.

I didn't hear the two horses come, but there's a young person behind me sort of attracting attention. When he moves there's a tinkle of iron, creaking leather, horsy smell, too, and presently he sets down along of me, cross-legged. I shoved him the pea-

nuts, but he lit a cigarette, offering me one. Though he wasn't, he just felt same as a seafaring man, so I didn't mind him being there.

"The ocean," says he, "is it allus like that?"

" 'Cept when there's weather."

"That's a ship?"

"Was."

"Dead?"

"Dead."

He wanted to look at my sheath knife, and when I handed it he seen the lettering "Green River" on the blade. He'd been along Green River and there's no knives like that.

Then I'd got to know about them iron things on his heels—spurs. We threw peanuts, my knife agin his spurs, and he won easy. Queer how all the time he's wanting to show himself off. He'd never seen salt water before. The shipping, making the port, or clearing, foreign or coastwise, the Hellafloat Yank, the Skowogian Coffin, the family packet, liner, tramp, fisher, lumberman, geordie and greaser was all the same to him. "Sounds like injun languages," says he, "can't you talk white?" So we went in swimming, and afterward there's a lunch he'd got with him—quart of pickled onions, and cigarettes.

Seems it's the vacuum in under which makes hearts feel so heavy.

This stranger begins to throw me horse talk and cow stories. It seems cow-punchers is sort of sailors of the plains, only it's different. Seafaring men gets wet and cold, and wrecked, but cow-boys has adventures instead, excitement, red streaks of life. Following the sea, I been missing life. Why, this guy ain't more'n two years older'n me—say, seventeen, but he's had five years ridin' for one man, four years for another, six years in Arizona, then three in Oregon, until he's added up about half a century. He's more worldly, too, than me—been in a train on the railroad. I'm surely humbled by four P. M., and if he keeps goin', by four bells I'll be young enough to set in mother's lap.

Says his name's Bull Durham. Surely I seen that name on lil' sacks of tobacco. Bull owns up this baccy's named after his father. And surely his old man must be pretty well fixed. "That's so," says Bull, blushing to show he's modest. "Ye see, kid, the old man's a bishop. Yes, Bishop of Durham, of course. Lives over to London, England. Got a palace thar, and a pew in the House of Lords. I'll be a lord when he quits. I'm the Honorable Bull by

rights, although I hate to have the boys in camp know that—make 'em feel real mean when all of 'em rides as well as me, or almost, and some can rope even better."

"And you is the young of a real lord!"

"Sure. I'll have to be a bishop, too, when I comes into the property. I'm a sort of vice-bishop, sonny. D'ye see these yere gloves? They got a string to tie 'em at the back, 'cause I been inducted. I got an entail I'll show you in camp, and a pair of hereditaments."

"Vice-bishop," says I, "is that like bo's'n's mate? I never hear tell of a bishop's mate."

"He mates in two moves," says Bull, "baptism and conflamation."

"But," says I, so he just shuts me up, saying I may be ignorant, but that ain't no excuse for being untruthful.

Well, his talk made me small and mean as a starved cat, but that was nothing to the emotions at the other end of me when he got me on one of them horses. I wanted to walk. Walk! The most shameful things he knew was walking and telling lies. If I walked he'd have nothing more to do with me. I rode till we got to the ferry.

You know in books how there's a line of stars acrost the page to show the author's grief. I got 'em bad by the time we rode into Invicta City. Draw the line right thar:

* * * * * * *

We're having supper at the Palladium, and I'm pretty nigh scared. The goblets is all full of pink and white serviettes, folded up into fancy designs, which come undone if you touched. There's a menu to say what's coming, in French so you don't know what you're eating, and durned if I can find out whether to tackle an a la mode with fingers or a spoon. Bull says it's only French for puckeroo, a sort of four-legged burrowing bird which inhabits silver mines, but if I don't like that, the lady will fetch me a *foe par*. Well, I orders one, and by the lady's face I see I done wrong, even before she complains to the manager. I'm surely miserable to think I've insulted a lady.

The manager's suspicious of me, but Bull talks French so rapid that even froggy can't keep up, although he smiles and shrugs, and gives us sang-fraws to drink.

This sort of cocktail I had, was the first liquor I'd tasted. It's powerful as a harbor tug, dropping me

out of the conversation, while the restaurant turns slowly round with a list to starboard, and Bull deals for a basket in the front window full of decorated eggs. Says they're vintage eggs, all verd-antique and bookay. For years the millionaires of Invicta has shrunk from the expense. My job when we leaves is to carry the basket, 'cause Bull's toting a second-handed saddle.

Bull lets me have cocktails to keep me from getting confused on the night of my day boo. I know I behaves with 'strordinary dignity, and wants more cocktails.

I dunno why Bull has to introduce me to the gentleman who keeps the peanut store down street—seeing I'd dealt there before. Anyway, I'm introduced to Affable Jones, and I'm the Markis of Worms—the same being a nom de plume. We proceeds to the opery-house, climbs in through a little hind window, and finds a dressing-room. Affable Jones dresses up as a monk, Bull Durham claims he's rigged out already as a vice-bishop, and I'm to be a chicken, 'cause I'm dealing vintage eggs in the cotillon. All the same, I'm left there alone for hours, and it's only when they comes back with a cocktail that I'll consent to dressing up as a chicken—which

in passing out through that lil' window is some crowded. We proceeds up street, me toting eggs, and practising chicken-talk, and it seems the general public is surprised.

So we comes to the Masonic Hall, which is all lights, and band, and fashionable persons rigged out in fancy dress, dancing the *horse doover*. I got the name from Bull, who says that the next turn is my day boo in the omlet cotillion. Seems it's all arranged, too. Affable Jones lines up the ladies on the left, the dudes on the right, all the length of the hall. Bull marches up the middle, spurs trailin' behind him, and there's me dressed as a chicken, with a basket of eggs, wondering whether this here cow-boy is the two persons I see, or only the one I can hear. Band's playing soft, Affable serves out tin spoons to the dudes, and I deals each a decorated egg, laying it careful in the bowl of the spoon, till there's only a few left over, and I'm safe along with Bull.

So far everybody seems pleased. Bull whispers in my ear, "Make for the back door, you son of a sea cook," which offends one, being true; waves an egg at the band for silence, and calls out, "Ladies and gents." From the back door I seen how all the

dudes has to stand dead still for fear of dropping an egg.

"Ladies," says Bull, "has any of you seen a live mouse? On the way up among you, seems I've dropped my mouse, and it's climbing skirts for solitude."

Then there's shrieks, screams, ladies throwing themselves into the arms of them dudes, eggs dropping squash, eggs going bang, Bull throwing eggs at every man not otherwise engaged, and such a stink that all the lights goes out. I'm grabbed by the scruff of the chicken, run out through the back door, and slung on the back of a horse. Bull's yelling "Ride! Ride! Git a move on!" He's flogging the horses with his quirt, he's yelling at me: "Ride, or we'll be lynched!"

My mouth's full of feathers, chicken's coming all to pieces—can't ride—daresn't fall off. So on the whole I dug the chicken's spurs into Mr. Horse, and rode like a hurricane in a panic. All of which reminds me that the hinder parts of an imitation bird is comforting whar she bumps. Still, draw them stars across.

* * * * * * *

I'm feeling better with twenty miles between me

and Invicta City. The sun transpires over the eastern sky-line, the horses is taking a roll, I'm seated on the remnants of the chicken, and Bull Durham says I'm his adopted orphan. "You rode," says he, "like a pudding on a skewer, you've jolted yo' tail through yo' hat, you looks like a half-skinned fool hen, and you've torn that poor mare's mouth till she smiles from ear to ear. Yet on the whole them proceedings is cheering you up, *and thar's more coming.*"

Looking back it seems to me that the first night's proceedings was calm. Thar was the fat German fire brigade pursuing an annual banquet across lots by moonlight, all on our way north, too, till the wagon capsized in a river.

Thar was the funeral obsequies of a pig, late deceased, with municipal honors, until we got found out.

Then we was an apparition of angels at a revival camp, only Bull's wings caught fire, and spoiled the whole allusion.

Yes, when I looks back on them radium nights entertainments along with Bull Durham, I see now what a success they was in learning me to ride. "What you need," says he, "is confidence. Got to

forget mere matters of habeas corpus, and how your toes point, and whether you're looking pretty. Just trust yo' horse to pull through, so that you ain't caught in the flower of youthful innocence, and hung on the nearest telegraph pole. You still needs eclair as the French say, and you got no *ung bong point,* but your *horse de combat* is feeling encouraged to pack you seventy miles last night, and we'll be in camp by sundown."

Once I been to a theater, and seen a play. Thar's act one, with fifteen minutes hoping for act two. Thar's act after act till you just has to fill up the times between with injun war-whoops, until act five, when all the ladies and gents is shot or married. It just cayn't go on. So the aujience says "Let's go'n have a drink," and the band goes off for a drink, and the lady with the programs tells you to get to hell out of that.

It's all over. The millionaire Lord Bishop of Durham is only Bull's father-in-law. Bull's not exactly a cow-boy yet—but assists his mother, Mrs. Brooke, who is chef at a ranch. It's not exactly a stock ranch, but they raise fine pedigree hogs. Bull won't be quite popular with his mother for having gorgeous celebrations with the hundred dollars she'd

give him to pay off a little debt. I'd better not come to the ranch after leading mummie's boy astray from the paths of virtue.

No, I cayn't set a saddle without giving the horse hysterics, and as for turning cow-boy, what's the matter with my taking a job as a colonel? I'd best climb off that mare, and hunt a job afoot. So long, Jesse.

There's the dust of Bull's horses way off along the road, and me settin' down by the wayside. A dog sets down in his skin, tail handy for wagging, all his possessions around him. I ain't even got no tail.

CHAPTER IV

THE ORDEAL BY TORTURE

THE Labrador was good to me, the sea was better, the stock range—wall, I'd four years punching cows, and I'm most surely grateful. Thar's plenty trades outside my scope of life, and thar's ages and ages past which must have been plenty enjoyable for a working-man. Thar's ages to come I'd like to sample, too. But so far as I seen, up to whar grass meets sky, this trade of punching cows appeals to me most plentiful. In every other vocation the job's just work, but all a cow-boy's paid for is forms of joy—to ride, to rope, to cut out, to shoot, to study tracks an' sign, read brands, learn cow. A bucking horse, a range fire, a gun fight, a stampede, is maybe acquired tastes, for I've known good men act bashful.

There's drawbacks also—I'd never set up thirst or sand-storms as being arranged to please, or claim to cheerfulness with a lame horse, or in a sheep

range, no. But then you don't know you're happy till you been miserable, and you'd hate the sun himself if he never set.

I ain't proposin' to unfold a lot of adventures, the same being mostly things I'd rather'd happened to some one else. An adventure comes along, an' it's "How d'ye do?" It's done gone, and *"Adios!"*

I was nigh killed in all the usual ways.

The sun would find us mounted, scattering for cattle; he'd set, leaving us in the saddle with a night herd still to ride. Hard fed, worked plenty, all outdoors to live in, and bone-weary don't ax, "Whar's my pillow?" No. The sun shines through us, and if it's cold we'll shiver till we sweat. The rains, the northers—oh, it was all so natural! Living with nature makes men natural.

We didn't speak much—pride ain't talkative. Riding or fighting we gave the foreman every ounce we'd got, and more when needed. Persons would come among us, mean, dirty, tough, or scared, sized-up before they dismounted, apt to move on, too. Them that stayed was brothers, and all our possessions usually belonged to the guy who kep' the woodenest face at poker.

The world in them days was peopled with only

two species, puncher an' tenderfoot, the last bein' made by mistake. Moreover, we cow-boys belonged to two sects, our outfit, and others of no account. And in our outfit, this Jesse person which is me, laid claims on being best man, having a pair of gold mounted spurs won at cyards from Pieface, our old foreman. I'd a rolled cantle, double-rig Cheyenne of carved leather, and silver horn—a dandy saddle that, first prize for "rope and tie down" agin all comers.

Gun, belt, quirt, bridle, hat, gloves, everything, my whole kit was silver mounted and everything in it a trophy of trading, poker, or fighting. Besides my string of ponies I'd Tiger, an entire black colt I'd broke—though I own he was far from convinced. Add a good pay-day in my off hind pocket, and d'ye think I'd own up to them twelve apostles for uncles? D'ye know what glory is? Wall, I suppose it mostly consists of being young.

In these days now, I've no youth left to boast of, but it's sweet to look back, to remember Sailor Jesse at nineteen, six foot one and filling out, full of original sin, and nothin' copied, feelin' small, too, for so much cubic contents of health, of growin' power, and bubbling fun. Solemn as a prairie injun, too,

knowing I was all comic inside, and mighty shy of being found out for the three-year kid I was.

Lookin' back it seems to me that all them vanities was only part of living natural, being natural. I seen cock birds playing up much the same to the hen birds—which made believe most solemn they wasn't pleased.

Time I speak of, our outfit had turned over three thousand head of long-horns to the Circle S and rode right into Abilene. Thar we was to take the train for our home ranch down south, and I hoped to get back to my dog pup Rockyfeller. In my bunk at the ram pasture, too, there was a china dog, split from nose to tip, but repaired. Yes, I keened for home. And yet I'd never before been on a railroad, and dreaded the boys would find out how scared I was of trains.

A sailorman feels queer, steppin' ashore on to streets which seem to heave although you know they don't—yes, that's what a puncher feels, too, alighting in a town. Gives you a sort of bow-legged waddle, and spurs on a sidewalk trail a lot too loud. I lit in Abilene with a blush, and just stood rooted while a guy selling gold watches reads my name graved on the saddle, and then addresses me as

Mister Smith. Old Pieface, scared for my morals, did kick this person sudden and severe, but all the same that *Mister* went to my head.

The smell of indoors made my stomach flop right over while we ranged up brave at the bar for a first drink. The raw rye felt like flames, though the preserved cherry afloat in it tasted familiar, like soap. At the same time the sight of a gambling lay-out made my pocket twitch, and I'd an inward conviction telling me this place ain't good for kids. It's the foreman sent me off with a message.

I rolled my tail, and curved off with Tiger to take in the sights of the town. He shied heaps, and it's curious to think why he objected to sign-boards, awnings, lamp-posts, even to a harmless person lying drunk. Then a railroad engine snorted in our face, so Tiger and me was plumb stampeded up a little side street. It's thar that he bucks for all he's worth, because of a kneeling man with a straw hat and a punctured soul, praying abundant. Of course this penitent turned round to enjoy the bucking match—and sure reveals the face of my ole friend, Bull Durham. We hadn't met for years, so as soon as Tiger was tired, Bull owned to finding the Lord, and being stony busted, ask if I was saved. I seen he'd got

'em bad, and shared my wad of money level with him. So we had cigars, a pound of chocolate creams, an oyster stew, and he bought a bottle of patent medicine for his liver. We shared that, and went on, he walking by my stirrup to the revival meeting.

This revival was happening at a barn, so I rode in. Tiger you see, needed religion bad, and when people tried to turn him out, he kicked them. You should just have heard what the preacher told the Lord about me, and all the congregation groaned at me being so young and fair, with silver harness, and the hottest prospects—just as Pieface always said when I was late for breakfast.

They had a great big wooden cross upon the dais, and somehow, I dunno why, that made me feel ashamed. A girl in a white dress was singing *Rock of Ages*—oh, most beautiful, her arms thrown round the cross, the sun-bright hair about her like a glory.

I could a' cried. Yes. For her great cat eyes were set on me, while her voice went through an' through me, an'—sudden a dumb yearning happened inside my belt. Seems that half-bottle of liver dope had scouted round, found all them chocolate creams, and rared up for battle. But no, the whisky was still calm, though I felt pale.

Something was goin' wrong, for a most frightsome panic clutched my throat. Suppose I'd caught religion! Oh, it couldn't be so bad as all that. Fancy being saved like them wormy railroad men, and town scouts, took abject because the sky pilot was explaining hell. Made in God's image? No. That don't apply to cowards.

An' yet it's cows to sheep thar's something wrong when tears runs down my face, because a girl—why since fifteen I'd been in love with every girl I seen. As a species they was scarce, some good, some even better. The sight of girls went to my head like liquor, and this one was surely good with her sunbright hair, her cheeks flushed 'cause I stared, her sulky lips rebuking when I throw'd a kiss, her yellow-brown eyes—

Oh, had I really washed behind my ears? Suppose I'd got high-water marks! Was my hands—I whipped off my gloves to inquire. That's what's the matter, sure. Got to make good before bein' introduced. Got to get a move on Tiger. I swung, spurred with one spring through the doors, yelled "Injuns" and stampeded, scatterin' gravel and panic through Abilene. I just went like one man for our cook wagon down by the railroad corrals.

Now, for all the shaving-glass could see, I was nice an' clean, but then that mirror has small views, and I'm not taking risks, but stripped and scrubbed all over. The place was so durned public I blushed from nose to heels till I was dressed again, shining my hair and boots. Then I procured an extra special, cherry-red, silk scarf out of the wrangler's kit.

Some of our boys made friendly signs as I passed on my way back, and fired a few shots after me for luck, but I'd no time to play. I joined the revival meeting just as the hat came round, so penitent sinners making for the door, came back to stay and pay because of Tiger. I give Bull ten dollars to hand to the hat, only he passed it into his own pocket. He seemed annoyed, too, saying, "Waste not, want not." Then he explained how the fire-escape only paid Miss Ellis fifty dollars a day, whereas he was making hundreds.

Just then she passed, and I got introduced. "Say, Polly," says Bull, "here's Sailor Jesse wants to get acquainted."

She stopped, sort of impatient for supper, and velvet-soft her voice, full of contempt.

"Oh, pshaw!"

Hard gold-brown eyes all scorn, soft gold-brown

hair, an' freckled neck, red lips, fierce, tiger fierce—

"Another damned suppliant?" she asked, and Bull was holding a light for her cigarette. "Is it saved?" she added.

I couldn't speak. I wanted to tell her how I despised all the religion I'd seen, the bigots it made, an' the cowards. I'd rather burn with the goats than bleat among sheep even now.

"Oh, that's all right, then," she said as though she answered me, and frank as a man she gave her hand to shake. "Good stunt of mine, eh? Although I own I'd like to have that cross stage-managed."

She passed the weather, admired Tiger, talked Browns and Joneses with Bull, turning her back on me, asked him to supper, walked off with him, an' that's all. Egg-shells throw'd in the ash-heap may feel like I did then.

Nobody loved me, 'cept our pony herd, inquirin' piteous for food an' water. A widow O'Flynn fed me supper, her grub bein' so scarce and bad, poor soul, she had to charge a dollar to make it pay. She kep' a wooden leg, and a small son. Our boys, of course, was drunk by then, just sleepin' whar they'd fell, so I was desolate as a moonlit dog-howl, ridin' herd with my night horse whar Polly's little home

glowed lights across the prairie. I seen Bull and the preacher leave there on toward midnight, walkin' sort of extravagant into town. The lights went out. Then times I'd take some sleep, or times ride herd guarding her little house, till the cold came, till the dawn broke, till the sun came up.

It was half past breakfast when I seen Bull again, on his knees like yesterday, a-puttin' up loud prayers, which made me sick. "Rehearsin'," says he, " 'cause Polly's struck, and I'm to be chief mourner."

He was my only chance of meetin' Miss Polly agen, so I was leadin' the talk around, when a guy comes butting into our conversation. He'd puffed sleeves to his pants, and was all dressed saucy, standing straddle, aiming to impress. "Oh, whar's my gun?" says Bull.

This person owned to being a gentleman, with a strong English accent. He'd 'undreds of 'orses at 'ome in 'Ammersmith, but wanted to own an 'ack 'ere, don'tcherknow.

So Bull lefts up his eyes to Heaven, praying, "Oh, don't deliver us from temptation yet!" Whereas I confided with this person about Bull being far gone in religious mania. I owned Bull right though, about my bein' a sailor, timid with 'orses; and he

seen for hisself the way I was riding my Sam 'orse somethin' dreadful. Told me I'd ought to 'old my 'ed 'igh instead of 'umping. It's in toes, down 'eels, young feller, an' don't be 'ard on the bally hanimal. He'd gimme lessons only I was frightened, but out aways from town the ground was softer for falling, an' I gained courage. Happens Miss Polly's house was opposite. I scrambled down ungainly, shoved a pebble in along Sam's withers, and let this gent explain just how to set an 'ard-mouthed 'unter. You 'olds 'is 'ed, placin' the 'and on the 'orn of the saddle, so. Then hup! That pebble done the rest.

They claim these flying men is safe while they stays in the air, herding with cherubs. That's what's the matter. It's only when this early aviator came down—bang—that he lit on his temper, and sat denouncing me. Yes, I'd been misunderstood, and when I told him it was all for the best he got usin' adjectives. He bet me his diamond ring to a dollar he'd ride Sam, and I must own the little man had grit. He'd have won, too—but for Sam.

Now, it's partly due to this 'ere entertainment, and the diamond ring I gave her, that Miss Polly began to perceive me with the naked eye, and said I might come to supper.

And that evening was most surely wonderful, in a parlor all antimacassars and rocker chairs with pink bows. She showed me plush photo albums, and hand-painted pictures of ladies with no clothes on. She played *Abide with Me* on the harmonium; she made me write poetry in her birthday book. There was champagne wine, the little cigarettes with dreams inside, and a bottle no bigger'n my thumb smellin' so fierce it well-nigh blew my head off. Oh, it was all so elegant and high-toned that I got proud of being allowed indoors.

Her people was real society, her poppa an army general, ruined by the war, her mother prime Virginian. But then she'd gone on the stage, so there was mean suspicions.

I hold suspicion to be a form of meanness when it touches women. My mother would have shied at naked ladies, and dad was powerful agin cigarettes. As for the smell, so fierce it had to be bottled, I'll own up I was shocked. But then you see mother, and dad, an' me being working people, was not supposed to feel the high-toned senses which belongs with wealth. It's not for grade stock like me to set up as judge on thoroughbreds, or call a lady immoral for using a spoon whar I should need a shovel.

No, I was playing worldliness for fear this lady'd think me ignorant. I was no more'n a little child strayed among civilization, scared of being found out childish. And I was surely panicky in a house —belonged outdoors among horses.

So it happened that in them days, while I rode guard upon Miss Polly, no man in Abilene could speak to her, or mention her name to me until I give him leave. She got to be known as Sailor Jesse's kill, and any person touching on my kill was apt to require a funeral.

It was the seventh day she married me. I know, because Bull, acting as best man, claimed a kiss, which she gave him. "Bull," says she, "didn't I bet you I'd marry Sailor Jesse within a week? You owe me twenty dollars." I saw the joke was on me.

I'd been in a dream. Love had made the yellow prairie shine like gold, that little prairie home a holy place, the woman in it something I'd kneel and pray to. There'd be lil' small children soon for me to play with, pride in earning food, the great big honor of guarding all of that from harm.

I came to marriage pure as any bear, or wolf, or fox, expecting to find my mate the same as me, getter

and giver of life, true to the earth, and fearless in doin' right.

Folks said I was young to marry at nineteen, but full nine years I'd earned my living, fought my way, and done my share of making happiness. I'd been served with a mouth full wide enough for laughin', a face which made folks smile when I was sad, eyes to see fun, the heart to take a joke if any offered, and when things hurt, I wasn't first to squeal. No: as long as the joke was on me I done my best to take it like a man.

But suppose—Well, I'd best explain that the English tenderfoot was at our wedding breakfast, and gettin' encouraged, he put up his best prize joke. He was all hoo, hoo, hoo at first, so funny he couldn't speak, the fellows waitin' each with his grin gettin' stale, and Polly laughing just to encourage him on. Then words got out which made the boys uneasy. Jake Haffering the Bar T foreman, told the hog to shut up, while others moved to get clear. I was sort of stupid, wanting the point explained, couldn't believe it possible the joke was on my wife, although I'd rose by then, with gun hand free. Then I saw, but the room seemed dark, and the tenderfoot all indistinct, backing away, and reaching slovenly for

weapons, while my bullet smashed in his shoulder. It slued him around as he dropped.

I could hear the flies in the window buzzing as I came to myself, seeing the hot street outside, the yellow plains beyond.

It was old Jake of the Bar T who spoke out then, and spoke straight.

"My boy," says he, "put up your gun. That's right. This here tenderfoot is bleedin' by spurts, arterial. Bull, see if Doc Stuart is sober." Bull ran for the doctor. "Only a tenderfoot," says Jake, "insults a cow-boy's wife—which is death from natural causes. Ma'am," he wagged his finger at Polly, "'tain't long since you come among us. 'Tain't more'n a day since you told me and others present that you was marryin' for fun. You laughed at warnings, and this here Jesse would have shot the man who warned him. You are a lady, and this boy you married for fun, is goin' to see you treated as a lady. I own he got rattled first shot, missing this tenderfoot's heart, which ain't up to average practise; but it's time you began to see the point of the joke."

They took the tenderfoot away, and we were alone, me watching the pool of red blood turning

brown. Polly sat drumming tunes on the table, her face turned white, staring out through the window at the noon heat of the plains. I remember I took a bottle of champagne wine, filled a big goblet, and drank it off. The flies were buzzing still agin the window. It made me laugh to think she'd taught me drinking, so I had another, watching the flies hold congress on the floor. "I see," says Polly, "I understand now." At that she began to scream.

I should have told you, that after our boys of the Flying Zee quit Abilene, I pitched a little A tent on the prairie back of Polly's house. Thar I could see my ponies at grass, and snuff the air clear of that stinking town.

But from the time I moved into the house, thar was something disturbing my nose—something uneasy—oh, I don't know what it was, back of all house smells, which give me a sense of evil, so I could hardly bear to stay indoors.

And there were signs. I'd come back from some errand into town, to find a man's track leading into the door, when Polly claimed she had no visitors. Why should she say she'd been alone all morning, when there's pipe ashes on the parlor table, or I'd

catch the wet smell from a chewed cigar? She only laughed.

Comin' from town one night—she'd sent me there—I seen a man's shadow cross the parlor blind. I fired, missing, a fool's act, for it warned him, and gave him time. The lamp was out before I reached the house, and Polly with some hysterics getting in my way.

It wouldn't be sense to show a match guiding the stranger's aim, or to stand against a window, or make sounds. Rather I stood right still, and after a while Polly surprised herself into dead silence. I couldn't hear that man, or feel, or see him. I could smell him, but that don't supply his bearings. I could taste the air from him, but that flickered. I sensed him. Can't explain that—no. You just feel if a man stares hard. I fired at that. Then Polly, of course, went off into all sorts of fits.

Next morning I tracked blood sign to the hospital. Seems a young person from the bank had took to conjuring and swallowed lead.

It was still before breakfast that I told Polly to pack her dunnage, 'cause we was moving out from Abilene. I claimed I could earn enough to keep my wife without her needing to go out into society.

"On cow-boy pay?" she said laughing. "On forty dollars a month? I spend more'n that on champagne. Here you *Miss* Jesse, who's payin' for this —you? Who keeps you, eh, Miss Prunes—and—prisms? Shamed of my bein' a lady, eh? I am a lady, too, and don't you forget it. And now, git out of my home."

I struck a match to the bo-kay of paper flowers, heaped on the hand-painted pictures, the paper fans, the rocker chairs, and slung the coal-oil lamp into the flames; then while she tore my shoulder with her teeth, I carried her to my tent. "That's your home now," I said, "the home of an honest working-man," I said, "and if another tough defiles my home, I'll kill you."

The house-warming gathered the neighbors, but she had no use for neighbors. Only they seen the line I drew in the dust around that tent, the dead-line. Afterward if any man came near that line, she'd scream.

But she'd taught me to drink, an' I drank, day after day, night after night, while she sat frightened in the tent, moaning when I came. Only when she was cured could I get work, not while I had to watch all day, all night. Only when she was cured

could I get work, make good, an' keep my wife as women should be kept. And I—and I—why if I let myself get sober once I'd remember, and remember, and go mad.

She swore she loved me, she vowed that she'd repented, and I believed until she claimed religion. I'd seen her breed of religion. I'd rather have her atheist than shamming. She would keep straight, and be my faithful wife if I'd quit drinking, if I'd only take her away. But she'd married me for a joke, and false as a cracked bell she'd chime out lies and lies, knowing as I knew that if she'd ever been the thing she claimed, I'd come into her life too late. How could she be the mother of my children, when —I drank, and sold my ponies to buy liquor, for there was no way out.

And by the time I'd only Tiger left, one night came Bull to find me just as dusk was falling. He'd been away, I hadn't seen him for weeks, and when he came to me in the Roundup saloon, I seen how frightened he was of speaking to me. I was drunk, too, scarce knowing what he said, just telling him to shut up and have a drink. Polly's bin hurt? Well, that's all right—have rye—Polly's been shot? That's good, we'd all have drinks. Was she dead?

She was dead.

And I was sober then as I am now.

"Murdered?" I asked.

"Jesse, she shot herself."

"Is that so?"

"Through the brow—above the eyes. Come, Jesse."

Next thing I was standing in the tent door, and it was so dark inside I had to strike a match. The sulphur tip burned blue, the wood flared, and for that moment, bending down, I seen the black dark hole between the eyes, the smear of drying blood. Then the match went out, and I—that was enough.

I gave Bull what I'd left, to pay for burial.

Then I was riding Tiger all alone, with my shadow drawin' slowly out ahead as the moon waned.

CHAPTER V

THE BURNING BUSH

AMONG the Indians, before a boy gets rated warrior, he goes alone afoot, naked, starvin', thirsty, way off to the back side of the desert. Thar he just waits, suns, weeks, maybe a whole moon, till the Big Spirit happens to catch his eye. Then the Big Spirit shows him a stick, or a stone, or any sort of triflin' common thing, which is to be his medicine, his wampum, the charm which guards him, hunting, or in war. There's the ordeal, too, by torture, done in the medicine lodge, so all the chiefs can see he's fit for bearin' arms. He's given the war-path secret, taking his rank as a man.

Among them Bible Indians you'll remember a feller called Moses, out at the back side of the desert, seen the Big Spirit in a burning bush. Later his tribe set up a medicine lodge, and the hull story's mighty natural.

This Indian life explains a lot to men like me,

raised ignorant, never grown-up—or at least not to hurt. I had the ordeal by torture, which done me good, and I been whar Moses went, and the Lord Christ too, seeking the medicine of the Almighty Father.

For as I'd broken ponies for their good till they got peaceful, so I was broke myself. Bein' full of pride an' sin as a young horse, so I was tamed until He reckoned me worth pasturage. Before then I'd work hard—yes, for pride. A bucking horse throws miles, sheer waste into the air, miles better pulled out straight the way you're goin'. I work for service, now.

You know when you've been in trouble, how you swing back thinking of edged words which would have cut, and dirty actions that you wish you'd done. These devils has got to go if you'd keep your manhood, harder to beat out than a talky woman, and even the littlest of them puts up a heap big fight. But when the last is killed, there's room for peace.

Sloth walks in front of trouble, peace follows after. Water is nothing till you thirst, rest nothing till you're weary, calm nothing till you've faced the storm, peace nothing until after war. But peace is like the water after thirst, rest when you're weary,

calm after storm, earnings of warriors only. Many find peace in death, only a few in life, and I found peace thar in the wilderness, the very medicine of torn souls, fresh from the hand of the Almighty Father.

And I found wealth. Seems there's many persons mistaking dollars for some sort of wealth. I've had a few at times by way of samples, the things which you're apt to be selfish with, or give away to buy self-righteousness. Reckoning with them projuces the feeling called poverty. They're the very stuff and substance of meanness, and no man walks straight-loaded. Dollars gets lost, or throwed away, or left to your next of kin, but they're not a good and lasting possession. I like 'em, too.

What's the good and lasting possession, the real wealth? Times I've been down in civilization, meeting folks who'd been rusting and rotting on one spot, from a while or so to a long lifetime, aye, and proud to boast in long decaying. They'd good memory, but nothing to remember. They're handy enough as purses if they were filled with coin. But where they're poor I'm rich, with wealth of memories, some good, some bad, all real. In coin like "seen" and "known" and "done" I'm millionaire. Ah, yes, but

times I wisht that I could part with things I've "lived" to help beginners, and keep moths out of candles. Things lived ain't current coin to be given, sold, lost, thrown, aye, or bequeathed. My body's meat and bones, my soul's the life I've lived, and mine until I square accounts with God. Queer reckoning that last. I guess He'll have to laugh, and He who made all life plumb full of humor, is due to enjoy some things He'll have to punish.

I found peace, I found wealth, yes, and found something more thar in the wilderness. Sweet as the cactus forest in blossom down Salt River is that big memory.

It was after I'd found the things of happy solitude. I'd gone to work then for the Bar Y outfit, breaking the Lightning colts. We was out a few weeks from home, taking an outfit of ponies as far as the Mesa Abaho, and one night camped at the very rim-rock of the Grand Cañon. The Navajo Indians was peevish, the camp dry, grass scant, herd in a raffish mood, and night come sudden.

I'd just relieved a man to get his supper, and rode herd wide alert. I scented the camp smoke, saw the spark of fire glow on the boys at rest, and heard their peaceful talk hushed in the big night. They

seemed such triflin' critters full of fuss since dawn, so small as insects at the edge of nothin', while for miles beneath us that old, old wolfy Colorado River was playing the Grand Cañon like a fiddler plays a fiddle. But the river in the cañon seemed no more than a trickle in a crack, hushed by the night, while overheard the mighty blazing stars—point, swing, and drive, rode herd on the milky way. And that seemed no more than cow-boys driving stock. Would God turn His head to see His star herds pass, or notice our earth like some lame calf halting in the rear?

And what am I, then?

That was my great lesson, more gain to me than peace and wealth of mind, for I was humbled to the dust of earth, below that dust of stars. So as a very humble thing, not worth praying for, at least I could be master of myself. I rode no more for wages, but cut out my ponies from the Lightning herd, mounted my stud horse William, told the boys good-by at Montecello, and then rode slowly north into the British possessions. So I come at last to this place, an old abandoned ranch. There's none so poor in dollars as to envy ragged Jesse, or rich enough to want to rob my home. They say there's hidden wealth whar the rainbow goes to earth—that's whar I live.

PART II

CHAPTER I

TWO SHIPS AT ANCHOR

Kate's Narrative

MY horse was hungry, and wanted to get back to the ranch. I was hungry too, but dared not go. I had left my husband lying drunk on the kitchen floor, and when he woke up it would be worse than that.

For miles I had followed the edge of the bench lands, searching for the place, for the right place, some point where the rocks went sheer, twelve hundred feet into the river. There must be nothing to break the fall, no risk of being alive, of being taken back there, of seeing him again. But the edge was never sheer, and perhaps after all, the place by the Soda Spring was best. There the trail from the ranch goes at a sharp turn, over the edge of the cliffs and down to the ferry. Beyond there are three great bull pines on a headland, and the cliff is sheer for at least five hundred feet. That should be far enough.

I let my horse have a drink at the spring, then we went slowly on over the soundless carpet of pine needles. I would leave my horse at the pines.

Somebody was there. Four laden pack-ponies stood in the shade of the trees, switching their tails to drive away the flies. A fifth, a buckskin mare, unloaded, with a bandaged leg, stood in the sunlight. Behind the nearest tree a man was speaking. I reined my horse. "Now you, Jones," he was saying to the injured beast, "you take yo'self too serious. You ain't goin' to Heaven? No! Then why pack yo' bag? Why fuss?"

I had some silly idea that the man, if he discovered me, would know what business brought me to this headland. I held my breath.

"And since you left yo' parasol to home, Jones, come in under out of the sun. Come on, you sunstruck orphan."

His slow, delicious, Texan drawl made me smile. I did not want to smile. The mare, a very picture of misery, lifted her bandaged, frightfully swollen leg, and hobbled into the shade. I did not want to laugh, but why was she called Jones? She looked just like a Jones.

"The inquirin' mind," said the man behind the

tree, "has gawn surely astray from business, or you'd have know'd that rattlers smells of snake. Then I asks—why paw?"

His voice had so curious a timbre of aching sympathy. He actually began to argue with the mare. "I've sucked out the pizen, Jones, hacked it out with my jack-knife, blowed it out with powder, packed yo' pastern with clay—best kind of clay—millionaires cayn't buy it. And I've took off your cargo. Now what more kin I do? Feedin' bottle's to home, and we're out of cough mixture. Why, what on airth—"

The mare, with her legs all astraddle, snorted in his face.

"Sugar is it? Why didn't ye say so befo'?"

Jones turned her good eye on the man as though she had just discovered his existence, hobbled briskly after him while he dug in his kitchen boxes, made first grab at the sugar bag, and got her face slapped. The man, always with his eye upon the mare, returned to his place, and sat on his heel as before. "Three lumps," he said, holding them one by one to be snatched. "You're acting sort of convalescent, Jones. No more sugar. And don't be a hawg!"

The mare was kissing his face.

"Back of all! Back water! Thar now, thank the lady behind me!"

And I had imagined my presence still unknown.

"How on earth," I gasped, "did you know I was here?"

The man's eyes were still intent upon the wounded mare. "Wall, Mrs. Trevor," he drawled.

"You know my name? Your back has been turned the whole time! You've never seen me in your life —at least I've never seen you!"

"That's so," he answered thoughtfully. "I don't need tellin' the sound of that colt yo' husband bought from me. As to the squeak of a lady's pig-skin saddle, thar ain't no other lady rider short of a hundred and eighty-three and a half miles."

What manner of man could this be? My colt was drawing toward him all the time as though a magnet pulled.

"This Jones," the man went on, "bin bit by a snake, is afraid she'll be wafted on high, so my eyes is sort of engaged in holding her down while she swells. She kicked me hearty, though, and loading sugar's no symptom of passing away, so on the whole I hope she'll worry along while I cook dinner."

He stood facing me, the bag still in his hand, and my colt asking pointedly for sugar. Very tall, gaunt, deeply tanned, perhaps twenty-five years of age, he seemed to me immeasurably old, so deeply lined was his face. And yet it was the face of one at peace. Purity of life, quaint humor, instant sympathy, may perhaps have given him that wonderful charm of manner which visibly attracted animals, which certainly compelled me as I accepted his invitation to dinner. I had been away since daybreak, and now the sun was entering the west. As to my purpose, that I felt could wait.

So I sat under the pines, pretending to nurse Jones while the shadows lengthened over the tawny grass, and orange needles flecked fields of rock, out to the edge of the headland.

The man unsaddled my horse, unloaded his ponies, fetched water from the spring of natural Apollinaris, but when, coming back, he found me lighting a fire, he begged me to desist, to rest while he made dinner. And I was glad to rest, thinking about the peace beyond the edge of the headland. Yet it was interesting to see how a man keeps house in the wilderness, and how different are his ways from those of a woman. No housewife could have

been more daintily clean, or shown a swifter skill, or half the silent ease with which this woodsman made the table-ware for one, enough to serve two people. But a woman would not clean a frying-pan by burning it and throwing on cold water. He sprinkled flour on a ground sheet, and made dough without wetting the canvas. Would I like bread, or slapjacks, or a pie? He made a loaf of bread, in a frying pan set on edge among glowing coals, and, wondering how a pie could possibly happen without the assistance of an oven, I forgot all about that cliff.

He parboiled the bacon, then peppered it while it was frying. When the coffee boiled, he thrust in a red coal to throw the grounds to the bottom. If I thought of English picnics, that was by way of contrast. My host had never known, I had almost forgotten, the shabby barriers, restraints, and traditions of that world where there are picnics. Frontiersmen are, I think, really spirits strayed out of chivalric ages into our century of all vulgarities. They are not abased, but only amused by our world's condescensions. Uneducated? They are better trained for their world than we are for ours. Their facts are at first-hand from life, ours only at second-hand from books. Illiterate? I should like to see one of our

professors read the tracks on a frontier trail. What was the good of the education which had led me to the brink of this cliff? My host, who lived always at the edge of death, had eyes which seemed to see my very thoughts. How else could he know that silence was so kind? To the snake-bitten mare he gave outspoken sympathy, to me his silence. Jones and I were his patients, and both of us trusted him.

He had found me out. The thing I had intended was a crime, and conscience-stricken, I dreaded lest he should speak. I could not bear that. Already his camp was cleaned and in order, his pipe filled and alight, at any moment he might break the restful silence. That's why I spoke, and at random, asking if he were not from the United States.

His eyes said plainly, "So that's the game, eh?" His broad smile said, "Well, we'll play." He sat down, cross-legged. "Yes," he answered, "I'm an American citizen, except," he added softly, "on election days, and then," he cocked up one shrewd eye, "I'm sort of British. Canadian? No, I cayn't claim that either, coming from the Labrador, for that's Newf'nland, a day's march nearer home.

"Say, Mrs. Trevor, you don't know my name yet. It's Smith, and with my friends I'm mostly Jesse."

"If you please, may I be one of your friends?"

"If I behave good, you may. No harm in my trying."

From behind us the sun flung beams of golden splendor and blue tree shadows, which went over the rim-rock into the misty depths of the abyss. Down there the Fraser roared. Beyond on the eastern side soared a vast precipice of gold and mauve which at an infinite height above our heads was crested with black pines. Level with our bench land that amazing cliff was cut transversely by a shelf of delicate verdure, with here and there black groves of majestic pines. Nearly opposite, half hidden by the trees, perched a log cabin, in form and in its exquisite proportion like some old Greek temple.

"And that is where you live?"

The moment Jesse Smith had given me his name, I knew him well by reputation. Comments by Surly Brown, the ferryman, and my husband's bitter hatred had outlined a dangerous character. Nobody else lived within a day's journey.

"That's my home," said Jesse. "D'ye see a dim trail jags down that upper cliff? That's whar I drifted my ponies down when I came in from the States. I didn't know of the wagon road from

Hundred Mile House to the ferry, which runs by the north end of my ranch."

"Your house," I said, "always reminds me of an eagle's aerie."

"Wall, it's better'n that. Feed, water, shelter, timber, and squatter's rights is good enough to make a poor man's ranch."

"And the tremendous grandeur of the place?"

"Hum. I don't claim to have been knocked all in a heap with the scenery. A thousand-foot wall and a hundred-foot gulch is big enough for dimples, and saves fencing. But if you left this district in one of them Arizona cañons over night, it would get mislaid.

"No. What took holt of me good and hard was the company,—a silved tip b'ar and his missus, both thousand pounders, with their three young ladies, now mar'ied and settled beyond the sky-line. There's two couples of prime eagles still camps along thar by South Cave. The timber wolf I trimmed out because he wasted around like a remittance man. Thar was a stallion and his harem, this yere fool Jones bein' one of his young mares. El Señor Don Cougar and his señora lived here, too, until they went into the sheep business with Surly Brown's new

flock. Besides that, there was heaps of lil' friendly folks in fur, hair, and feathers. Yes, I have been right to home since I located."

"But grizzly bears? How frightful!"

"Yes. They was frightened at first. The coarse treatment they gets from hunters, makes them sort of bashful with any stranger. Ye see, b'ars yearns to man, same as the heathen does to their fool gods, whereas bullets, pizen, and deadfalls is sort of discouraging. Their sentiments get mixed, they acts confused, and naturally if they're shot at, they'll get hostile same as you and me. They is misunderstood, and that's how nobody has a kind word for grizzlies."

"But the greatest hunters are afraid of them."

"The biggest criminals has got most scare at police. B'ars has no use for sportsmen, nor me neither. My rifle's heaps fiercer than any b'ar, and I've chased more sportsmen than I has grizzlies."

"Wasn't Mr. Trevor one of them?"

Jesse grinned.

"Tell me," I said, for the other side of the story must be worth hearing.

"Wall, Mr. Trevor took out a summins agin me for chasing him off my ranch. He got fined for

having no gun license, and no dawg license, and not paying his poll-tax, and Cap Taylor bound him over to keep the peace. I ain't popular now with Mr. Trevor, whereas he got off cheap. Now, if them b'ars could shoot—"

I hadn't thought of that. "Can they be tamed?" I asked.

"Men can be gentled, and they needs taming most. Thar was three grizzlies sort of adopted a party by the name of Capen Adams, and camped and traveled with him most familiar. Once them four vagrants promenaded on Market Street in 'Frisco. Not that I holds with this Adams in misleading his b'ars among man-smell so strong and distrackful to their peace of mind. But still I reckon Capen Adams and me sort of takes after each other. I'm only attractive to animals."

"Oh, surely!" I laughed.

But Jesse became quite dismal. "I'm not reckoned," he bemoaned himself, "among the popular attractions. The neighbors shies at coming near my ranch."

"Well, if you protect grizzlies and hunt sportsmen, surely it's not surprising."

"Can't please all parties, eh? Wall, perhaps that's

how the herd is grazing. Yes. Come to think of it, I remember oncet a Smithsonian grave robber comes to inspeck South Cave. He said I'd got a boneyard of some ancient people, and he'd rob graves to find out all about them olden times. He wanted to catch the atmosphere of them days, so I sort of helped. Robbing graves ain't exactly a holy vocation, the party had a mean eye, a German name, and a sort of patronizing manner, but still I helped around to get him atmosphere, me and Eph."

"Who's Eph?"

"Oh, he's just a silver-tip, what scientific parties calls *ursus horribilis ord.* You just cast your eye whar the trickle stream falls below my cabin. D'ye see them sarvis berry bushes down below the spray?"

"Where the bushes are waving? Oh, look, there's a gigantic grizzly standing up, and pulling the branches!"

"Yes, that's Eph.

"Wall, as I was tellin' you, Eph and me is helping this scientific person to get the atmosphere of them ancient times."

"But the poor man would die of fright!"

"Too busy running. When he reached Vancouver,

he was surely a cripple though, and no more use to science."

"Crippled?"

"Yes, lost his truthfulness, and a professor without truth is like a woman with no tongue, plumb disabled. His talk in the Vancouver papers beat Ananias, besides exciting a sort of prejudice. The neighbors shies at me, and I'm no more popular. Shall I call Eph?"

"I think not to-day," said I, hurriedly rising, "for indeed I should be getting home at once."

Without ever touching the wound, he had given me the courage to live, had made my behavior of the morning seem that of a silly schoolgirl; but still I did not feel quite up to a social introduction. I said I was sure that Eph and I would have no interests in common.

"So you'll go home and face the music?" said Jesse's wise old eyes.

"My husband," said I, "will be getting quite anxious about me."

Without a word he brought my horse and saddled him.

And I, with a sinking heart, contrasted the loneli-

ness and the horror which was called my "home" with all the glamour of this man's happy solitude.

While Jesse buckled on the head-stall, some evil spirit prompted me to use the word "romantic." In swift resentment he seized and rent the word.

"Romantic? Snakes! Thar's nothen romantic about me. What I can't earn ain't worth stealing, and I most surely despise all shiftless people."

"Forgive me. I did not mean romantic in that sense."

"Lady, what did you mean?"

"May I say picturesque?"

He spat. "Thank Gawd I ain't that, either. I'd shoot myself if I thought I was showing off, or dressing operatic, or playing at bein' more than I am."

Seeing him really hurt, I made one last wriggle.

"May I say what I mean by romance?"

He held the stirrup for me to mount, offered his hand.

"Do you never get hungry," I asked, "for what's beyond the horizon?"

He sighed with sheer relief, then turned, his eyes seeing infinite distances. "Why, yes! That country beyond the sky-line's always calling. Thar's some-

thing I want away off, and I don't know what I want."

"That land beyond the sky-line's called romance."

He clenched his teeth. "What does a ship want when she strains at anchor? What she wants is drift. And I'm at anchor because I've sworn off drift."

At that we parted, and I went slowly homeward, up to my anchor. Dear God! If I might drift!

CHAPTER II

THE TREVOR ACCIDENT

N. B.—Mr. Smith, while living alone, had a habit of writing long letters to his mother. After his mother's death the habit continued, but as the letters could not be sent by mail, and to post them in the stove seemed to suggest unpleasant ideas, they were stowed in his saddle wallets.

Dear Mother in Heaven:

There's been good money in this here packing contract, and the wad in my belt-pouch has been growing till Doctor McGee suspecks a tumor. He thinks I'll let him operate, and sure enough that would reduce the swelling.

Once a week I take my little pack outfit up to the Sky-line claim for a load of peacock copper. It runs three hundred dollars to the ton in horn silver, and looks more like jewels than mineral. Iron Dale's cook, Mrs. Jubbin, runs to more species of pies and cake than even Hundred Mile House, and after din-

ner I get a rim-fire cigar which pops like a cracker, while I sit in front of the scenery and taste the breath of the snow mountains. Then I load the ponies, collects Mick out of the cook house, which he's partial to for bones, Iron slings me the mail-pouch, and I hits the trail. I aim to make good bush grass in the yellow pines by dusk, and the second day brings me down to Brown's Ferry, three miles short of my home. From the ferry there's a good road in winter to Hundred Mile House, so I tote the cargoes over there by sleigh. There my contract ends, because Tearful George takes on with his string team down to the railroad. I'd have that contract, too, only Tearful is a low-lived sort of person, which can feed for a dollar a week, whereas when I get down to the railroad, I'm more expensive.

Did you hear tell of the Cock and Bull Ranch? Seeing it's run by a missionary you may have the news in Heaven. This man starts a stock ranch with a bull and cow, a billy-goat and nanny-goat, a rooster and hen; but it happened the cow, the hen, and the nanny-goat got drowned on the way up-country; and ever since then the breeding ain't come up to early expectations.

Well, it's much the same way with me since my

stallion William died—of trapezium, I think the doctor said. The mares are grinning at me ever since, and it will take nine months more of this packing contract before I can buy another stud horse. Then there's the mortgage, and the graveyard artist has seized your tombstone until I pay for repairing the angel on top. Life's full of worries, mother.

Your affectionate son,

JESSE.

Rain-storm coming.

P. S.—It's a caution to see how Jones steps out on the home trail. Or'nary as a muel when she has to climb, she hustles like a little running horse to git back down to bush grass. All night in the pines I'll hear her bell through my dreams, while she and her ponies feed, then the stopping of the bell wakes me up, for them horses doze off from when the Orion sets until its cocklight when I start my fire. By loading-time they've got such grass bellies on them that I has to be quite severe with the lash rope. They hold their wind while I cinch them, and that's how their stomachs get kicked.

Yes, it's a good life, and I don't envy no man. Still it made me sort of thoughtful last time as I swung along with that Jones mare snuggling at my

wrist, little Mick snapping rear heels astern, and the sun just scorching down among the pines. Women is infrequent, and spite of all my experiences with the late Mrs. Smith—most fortunate deceased, life ain't all complete without a mate. It ain't no harm to any woman, mother, if I just varies off my trail to survey the surrounding stock.

Mrs. Jubbin passes herself off for a widow, and all the boys at the mine take notice that she can cook. Apart from that, she's homely as a barb-wire fence, and Bubbly Jock, her husband, ain't deceased to any great extent, being due to finish his sentence along in October, and handy besides with a rifle.

Then of the three young ladies at Eighty Mile, Sally is a sound proposition, but numerously engaged to the stage drivers and teamsters along the Cariboo Road. Miss Wilth, the schoolma'am, keeps a widow mother with tongue and teeth, so them as smells the bait is ware of the trap. That's why Miss Wilth stays single. The other girl is a no-account young person. Not that I'm the sort to shy at a woman for squinting, the same being quite persistent with sound morals, but I hold that a person who scratches herself at meals ain't never quite the lady. She should do it private.

There's the Widow O'Flynn on the trail to Hundred Mile,—she's harsh, with a wooden limb. Besides she wants to talk old times in Abilene. I don't.

As to the married women, I reckon that tribe is best left alone, with respects. If you sees me agin, it will be in Heaven, and I don't aim to disappoint you by turning up at the other place. I'd get religion, mother, but for the sort of swine I seen converted, but even for the sake of finding grace I ain't going to graze with them cattle.

While I've mostly kep' away from the married ladies, and said "deliver us from temptation" regular every night, there was no harm as I came along down, in being sorry for Mrs. Trevor. Women are reckoned mighty cute at reading men, but I've noticed when I've struck the complete polecat, that he's usually married. So long as a woman keeps her head she's wiser than a man, but when she gets rattled she's a sure fool. She'll keep her head with the common run of men, but when she strikes the all-round stinker, like a horse runs into a fire, she ups and marries him. Anyway, Mrs. Trevor had got there.

Said to be Tuesday.

Trip before last was the first time I seen this lady.

The trail from Trevor's meets in with the track from Sky-line just at the Soda Spring. From there a sure-enough wagon road snakes down over the edge of the bench and curves away north to Brown's Ferry. At the spring you get the sound of the rapids, you catch the smell of the river like a wet knife, you looks straight down into white water, and on the opposite bench is my ranch.

Happens Jones reckoned she'd been appointed inspector of snakes, so I'd had to lay off at the spring, and Mrs. Trevor comes along to get shut of her trouble. She's hungry; she ain't had anything but her prize hawg to speak to for weeks, and she's as curious as Mother Eve, anyway. Curiosity in antelopes and women projuces venison and marriages, both species being too swift and shy to be met up with otherwise.

She's got allusions, too, seeing things as large as a sceart horse, so she's all out of focus, supposin' me to be romantic and picturesk, wharas I'm a working-man out earning dollars. Still it's kind in any lady to take an interest, and I done what you said in aiming at the truth, no matter what I hits.

Surely my meat's transparent by the way her voice struck through among my bones. If angels speak

like that I'd die to hear. She told me nothin', not one word about the trouble that's killing her, but her voice made me want to cry. If you'd spoke like that when I was your puppy, you'd a had no need of that old slipper, mother.

'Cause I couldn't tear him away from the beef bones, I'd left Mick up at the Sky-line, or I'd ast that lady to accept my dog. You see, he'd bite Trevor all-right, wharas I has to diet myself, and my menu is sort of complete. Still by the time she stayed in camp, my talk may have done some comfort to that poor woman. She didn't know then that her trouble was only goin' to last another week.

This is pie day. I comes now to describing my last trip down from the Sky-line, when I hustled the ponies just in case Mrs. Trevor might be taking her *cultus cooly* along toward Soda Spring. Of course she wasn't there.

You'd have laughed if you'd seen Jones after she drank her fill of water out of the bubbly spring, crowded with soda bubbles. She just goes hic, tittup, hic, down the trail, changing step as the hiccups jolted her poor old ribs. The mare looked so blamed funny that at first I didn't notice the tracks along the road.

To judge by the hind shoes, Mrs. Trevor's mean colt had gone down toward the river not more'n ten minutes ago, on the dead run, then back up the road at a racking out-of-breath trot. Something must have gone wrong, and sure enough as I neared a point of rocks which hid the trail ahead, Jones suddenly shied hard in the midst of a hiccup. There was the Widow Bear's track right across the road, and Mick had to yell blue blazes to get the other ponies past the smell. Ahead of me the tracks of the Trevor colt were dancing the width of the road, bucking good and hard at the stink of bear. Then I rounded the point of rocks.

There lay Mrs. Trevor all in a heap. The afternoon sun caught her hair, which flamed gold, and a green humming-bird whirred round as though it were some big flower. Since Jones would have shied over the tree-tops at a corpse or a whiff of blood, I knew she'd only fainted, but felt at her breast to make sure. I tell you it felt like an outrage to lay my paw on a sleeping lady, and still worse I'd only my dirty old hat to carry water from a seepage in the cliff. My heart thumped when I knelt to sprinkle the water, and when that blamed humming-bird came whirring past my ear, I jumped as though the

devil had got me, splashing the hatful over Mrs. Trevor. At that her eyes opened, staring straight at my face, but she made out a sort of smile when she saw it was only me.

"Jesse!"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Seen my husband?"

"No, ma'am."

"I don't know what's come over him," she moaned, clenching her teeth; "he fired at me."

"That gun I traded to him?"

"Four shots."

"You was running away when your colt shied at the bear?"

"My ankle! Jesse, it hurts so dreadfully. Yes the left."

My knife ripped her riding-boot clear. The old red bandana from my neck made her a wet bandage, and the boot top served for a splint. There was no call to tell her the foot was broken, and the fainting fits eased my job. Between whiles she would tell me to hurry, knowing that the return of that damned colt would show Trevor which way she'd run. I had no weapon, so if Trevor happened along with the .45 revolver it wouldn't be healthy.

I couldn't leave the loads of ore on my ponies, and if I got Mrs. Trevor mounted with her foot hanging down, she'd lose time swooning. So I unloaded all the ponies except Jones, and turned them loose, keeping Jones and Swift, who has a big heart for travel. Next I filled one of the rawhide panniers with brush, and lashed it across Jones' neck for a back rest. A wad of pine brush made a seat between Jones' panniers where I mostly carry my grub. Hoisting Mrs. Trevor on to the mare's back was a pretty mean job, but worst of all I had to lash her down. Taking my thirty-eight-foot rope I threw a single-hand diamond, hitching the lady good and hard to mare and cargo. Her head and shoulders was over Jones' neck, her limbs stretched out above his rump, where I had made them fast with a sling rope. I've packed mining machinery, wheels, and once a piano, but I never heard tell of any one packing a lady. For chafing gear to keep the ropes from scorching, I had to use my coat, shirt, and undershirt, so that when I mounted Swift to lead off, I'd only boots and overalls, and Mrs. Trevor could see I was blushing down to my belt. Shocked? Nothing! Great ladies doesn't shock like common people. No, in spite of the pain-racking and the fear-haunting, she laughed, and it

done me good. She said I looked like Mr. Pollo Belvideary, a dago she'd met up with in Italy. Dagos are swine, but the way she spoke made me proud.

Jones leads good, which was well for me riding bareback, for we didn't stop to pick flowers.

Washing day after supper.

We weren't more than half-way down to the river when we heard Trevor surging and yelling astern, somewheres up on the bench. At that I broke to a trot, telling the lady to let out a howl the moment it hurt beyond bearing. I wonder what amount of pain is beyond the bearing of real thoroughbreds? That lady would burn before she'd even whimper.

Nearing the ferry my innards went sick, for the punt was on the far bank, the man was out of sight, and even Jones wouldn't propose to swim the river with a cargo of mineral and a deck load. As we got to the door of Brown's cabin, Trevor hove in sight.

Now, supposing you're poor in the matter of time, with, say, half a minute to invest to the best advantage, you try to lay out your thirty seconds where they will do most good. I lep' to the ground, giving Jones a hearty slap on the off quarter, which would steer her behind Brown's cabin; then with one jump

I grabbed old man Brown's Winchester rifle from its slings above the hearth, shoved home two cartridges from the mantel, rammed the muzzle through the window-pane, which commands a view up the trail, and proceeded to take stock of Mr. Trevor.

The man's eyes being stark staring mad, it was a sure fact he'd never listen to argument. If I shot him, the horse would surge on, dropping the corpse at Mrs. Trevor's feet, which would be too sudden to please. If I stopped the horse at full gallop, the rider would go on till he hit the scenery, and after that he wouldn't feel well enough to be injurious. That's why I waited, following with the rifle until the horse's shoulder widened out, giving me a clear aim at the heart.

The horse finished his stride, but while I was running to the door, he crumpled and went down dead, the carcass sliding three yards before it stopped. As to the man, he shot a long curve down on his back in a splash of dust, which looked like a brown explosion. His revolver went further on whirling, until a stump touched off the trigger, and its bullet whined over my head.

Next thing I heard was the rapids, like a church organ finishing a hymn, and Mrs. Trevor's call.

"You've killed him?"

"No, ma'am, but he's had an accident. I'll take him to the cabin for first aid."

Trevor was sitting up by the time I reached him. He looked sort of sick.

"Get up," said I, remembering to be polite in the presence of a lady. "Get up, you cherub."

Instead of rising, he reached out a flask from his pocket, and uncorked to take a little nourishment. I flicked the bottle into the river, and assisted him to rise with my foot. "My poor erring brother," said I, "please step this way, or I'll kick your tail through your hat."

He said he wasn't feeling very well, so when I got him into the cabin, I let him lie on Brown's bed, lashing him down good and hard. I gave him a stick to bite instead of my fingers, which is private. "Now," said I, "your name is Polecat. You're due to rest right there, Mr. Polecat, until I get the provincial constable." I gathered from his expression that he'd sort of taken a dislike to me.

Swift and the mare were grazing on pine chips beside the cabin, and Mrs. Trevor looked wonderfully peaceful.

"Your husband," said I, "is resting."

She gave me a wry laugh, and seeing she was in pain, I poured water over her foot.

"That's better," said she, "how good you are to me!"

Old man Brown was coming across with the punt, mighty peevish because I'd dropped a horse carcass to rot at his cabin door, and still worse when he seen I had a lunatic roped in his bunk. Moreover, he wasn't broke to seeing ladies used for cargo on pack-animals, or me naked to the belt, and making free with his rifle. I give him his Winchester, which he set down by his door, also a dollar bill, but he was still crowded full of peevishness, wasting the lady's time. At last I hustled the ponies aboard the punt, and set the guide lines so that we started out along the cable, leaving the old man to come or stay as he pleased. He came. Fact is, I remembered that while I took Mrs. Trevor to my home, I'd need a messenger to ride for doctor, nurse, groceries, and constable. I'm afraid old man Brown was torn some, catching on a nail while I lifted him into the punt. His language was plentiful.

Now I thought I'd arranged Mrs. Trevor and Mr. Trevor and Mr. Brown, and added up the sum so that old Geometry himself couldn't have figured it

better. Whereas I'd left out the fact that Brown's bunk was nailed careless to the wall of his cabin. As Trevor struggled, the pegs came adrift, the bed capsized, the rope slacked, and the polecat, breaking loose, found Brown's rifle. I'd led the ponies out of the punt, and was instructing Brown, when the polecat let drive at me from across the river. With all his faults he could shoot good, for his first grazed my scalp, half blinding me. At that the lady attracted attention by screaming, so the third shot stampeded poor Jones.

I ain't religious, being only thirty, and not due to reform this side of rheumatism, but all the sins I've enjoyed was punished sudden and complete in that one minute. Blind with blood, half stunned, and reeling sick, I heard the mare as she plunged along the bank dispensing boulders. No top-heavy cargo was going to stand that strain without coming over, so the woman I loved—yes, I knew that now for a fact—was going to be dragged until her brains were kicked out by the mare. It seemed to me ages before I could rouse my senses, wipe my eyes, and mount the gelding. When sight and sense came back, I was riding as I had never dared to ride in all my life, galloped Mr. Swift on rolling boulders steep as

a roof, and all a-slither. I got Swift sidewise up the bank to grass, raced past the mare, then threw Swift in front of Jones. Down went the mare just as her load capsized, so that she and the lady, Swift and I, were all mixed up in a heap.

My little dog Mick was licking my scalp when I woke, and it seemed to me at first that something must have gone wrong. My head was between two boulders, with the mare's shoulder pressing my nose, my legs were under water, and somewhere close around was roaring rapids. Swift was scrambling for a foothold, and Mrs. Trevor shouting for all she was worth. I waited till Swift cleared out, and the lady quit for breath.

"Yes, ma'am," says I.

"Oh, say you're not dead, Jesse!"

"Only in parts," said I, "and how are you?"

"I'm cutting the ropes, but oh, this knife's so blunt!"

"Don't spoil your knife. Will you do what I say?"

"Of course I will."

"Reach out then on the off side of the load. The end of that lashing's fast to the after-basket line."

When I'd explained that two or three times, "I have it," she answered. "Loose!"

"Pull on the fore line of the diamond."

"Right. Oh, Jesse, I'm free!"

"Kneel on the mare's head, reach under the pannier, find the latego, and cast off."

She fumbled a while, and then reported all clear.

"Get off the mare."

In another moment Jones was standing up to shake herself, knee deep in the river, and with a slap I sent her off to join Swift at the top of the bank. Mrs. Trevor was sitting on a boulder, staring out over the rapids, her eyes set on something coming down mid-stream. Her face was all gray, and she clutched my hand, holding like grim death. As for me, I'd never reckoned that even a madman would try to swim the Fraser in clothes and boots.

"I can't bear it!" she cried, turning her face away. "Tell me—"

"I guess," said I, feeling mighty grave, "you're due to become a widow."

The rapids got Trevor, and I watched.

"You are a widow," says I, at last.

She fainted.

There, I'm dead sick of writing this letter, and my wrist is all toothache. JESSE.

CHAPTER III

LOVE

Kate's Narrative

JESSE argues that there's nothing to boast of in the way he saved me. Horse and rifle are like feet to run with, hands to fight with, part of his life. "Now, if I'd rode a giraffe and harpooned you, I'd have my name in all the papers. Shucks! Skill and courage are things to shame the man who hasn't got them."

I married Lionel Trevor in the days when he looked like a god as Parsifal, sang like an angel, had Europe at his feet. "Something wrong with Europe," is Jesse's comment. "West of the Rockies we don't use such, except to sell their skins."

When Lionel lost his voice—more to him than are horse and gun to Jesse—he would not ask me to follow him into the wilderness but tried to persuade me to stay on in London. I was singing "Eurydice" in *Orfeo,* my feet, thanks to Lionel, were at last on

the great ladder, and if I was ambitious, who shall blame me? Yet for better, for worse, we were married, and here among the pines, in this celestial air, a year or two at the most would give him back his voice. My place was at his side, for better or worse, and when he drank, when day by day I watched the light of reason give place in his eyes to bestial vice, until at last I found myself chained to a maniac—till death us do part—it was then I first saw Jesse, the one man whose eyes showed understanding.

I can't write about that day when Lionel, a thing possessed of devils, hunted me through the woods like a bear. It wasn't fair. I'm only twenty-eight years old. It wasn't fair that I should be treated like that. I doubt if I remember all that happened. I must have been crazed with pain and fear until suddenly I woke up on a boulder by that awful river, and saw him drift past me, caught in the rapids, drowning. I would have shouted I was so glad, until he saw me, and dying as he was, looked at me with Lionel's clear sane eyes.

I fainted, and when I awoke again in the dusk, Jesse bent over me, not as he is, the rugged fighting frontiersman, but dressed in white, wearing a wreath of beaten gold leaves, the laurel crown. He was a

Greek warrior, and it seemed to me that I, too, wore the Grecian dress, a milk-white peplum. We were walking side by side along a beach between the cliffs and the sea. He stopped, looking seaward, his bronzed face set with an anxiety, which as he watched, became fear. He clasped me in his arms, and then I saw that out of the distance of the sea, came a wave, rushing straight at us, a monstrous tidal wave with curved and glassy front, crowned with a creaming surf of high-flung diamond. The cliff barred all escape, and we stood waiting, locked in each other's arms, commending our spirits to the gods—

My eyes broke through the vision, for Jesse, the real Jesse of this present life, shook me, imploring me to rouse myself. He says I woke up shouting "Zeus! Zeus!" He lifted me in his arms and carried me.

Of course I was hysterical, being overwrought, and the very thought is nonsense that in some past life thousands of years ago, Jesse and I were lovers. That night and for three weeks afterward, I lay delirious. At the ferryman's cabin he made me a bed of pine boughs, until my household stuff and the Chinese servant could be brought down from the

ranch. He sent Surly Brown to bring Doctor McGee, and the Widow O'Flynn as my nurse, while her son Billy was hired to do his pack-train work. From that time onward the pack outfit carried cargoes of ore from the mine, and loads from Hundred Mile House of every comfort and luxury which money could buy for me. Jesse bought tents, which he set up beside the cabin, one for my servant, the other for Brown and himself, besides such travelers as from time to time stayed over night at the ferry. When I got well, I found that Jesse had spent the savings of years, and had not a dollar left.

The widow nursed me by day, Jesse by night, and after one attempt by Mrs. O'Flynn, it was he who dressed my foot. In his hands he had the delicate strength of a trained surgeon, but also something more, that sympathetic touch which charms away pain, bringing ease to the mind as well as to the body. "'Tisn't," said he, "as if you kicked me out of the stable every time I laid a hand on yo' pastern. That Jones, when she hurt her foot, just kicked me black and blue."

When at last I crept out of doors to bask in the autumn sunlight, the cotton woods and aspens were changed to lemon, the sumac to crimson, the fallen

needles of the pines clothed the slopes with orange, and a mist of milky blue lay in the cañon. Very beautiful were those days, when no breath of wind stirred the warm perfume, and the music of the rapids echoed from sun-warmed precipice and glowing woodlands up to the gorgeous cobalt of the sky. Cured of all sick fancies, I was content to rest.

Jesse had arranged with lawyers for the probate of Lionel's will, and settlement of his debts, which would leave me nothing. As far as Jesse knew, I was penniless, and to this day I have never dared acknowledge that, secured from the extravagance of my late husband, I have capital bringing in some seven thousand, five hundred dollars a year. Jesse supposed me to be destitute, and when I spoke of returning to my work in Europe, offered to raise the money for my passage. Knowing his ranch to be mortgaged already to its full value, I wondered what limit there was to this poor man's valor. Yes, I would accept, assuring him of swift repayment, yet dared not tell him the wages offered me at Covent Garden. It seemed indecent that a woman's voice should be valued at more per week than his heroic earnings for a year.

I sang to him, simple emotional music: Orfeo's

lament, the finale of *Il Trovatore,* the angel song from Chopin's *Marche Funèbre.*

There was the last of my poor little test which had proved in him a chivalry, a generosity, a moral valor, a physical courage, a sense of beauty, a native humor, which made me very humble. All I had foolishly imagined in poor Lionel, all that a woman hopes for in a man, was here beyond the accidents of rank or caste. How pitiful seemed the standards of value which rated Lionel a gentleman, and this man common! Jesse is something by nature which gentlemen try to imitate with their culture. Should I go back to imitations? I had outlived all that before I realized the glory of the great wilderness, before I met Jesse and loved him.

Could I promise to love, honor and obey? I loved him, I honored him, and as to obeying, of course that's the way they are managed.

I wonder why women make it so important that a man should propose? It needed no telling that Jesse and I were in love. It seemed only natural that we should marry, and any pretense of mourning for the late Mr. Trevor would have been distasteful.

My dear father was content with my first marriage, because—it seems so quaint—Mr. Trevor was

a sound churchman. The old saint had indeed one misgiving, for Lionel was very high church, and if he reverted to Rome, the religious education of any children—my father has found peace in a land where there are no doctrinal worries. But for his daughter he would pray still, lest she be yoked with an unbeliever. For my father's sake I asked Jesse about his religious convictions.

"Wall," he explained, "my old mother was a Hard-Shell Baptist, and father was Prohibition, so if them two forms of ignorance came to be used around here, I'd be a sort of mongrel."

"Surely you don't think the churches mere forms of ignorance?"

"Ignorance," he took the word up thoughtfully. "It's a thing I practises, and am apt to recognize by the way it acks. It ain't so scarce in them churches as you'd think. Maybe, knowin' more than me, you can tell me about that Sermon on the Mount. Was it a Catholic Mount, or Baptist, or Episcopalian?"

"Surely a hill, or mountain."

"And Jesus took his people away from the smell of denominations—Scribes, Pharisees, and such, to some place outdoors?"

The idea struck me full in the face like a sudden

lash of spray, but before I could clear my eyes, the man had followed his thought to a weird conclusion.

"The more they build churches and chapels to corral Him, the more He takes to the woods. I sort of follow."

This only left me to wonder what my dear old white saint would have said.

Certainly he could never have accepted that American citizenship, and Jesse's nationality is vague. "Thar's God," he would say quite reverently, "and Mother England, and Uncle Sam, but beyond that I ain't much acquainted. The rest seems to be sort of foreigners. The Labrador? Oh, that's just trimmings."

Whatever he is, I love him,—primitive, elemental, kin of the woodland gods, habitant of the white sierras, the august forest, and the sweet wild pastures. My doubts fluttered away from the main issue to settle down on very twigs of detail. I had not courage to imagine what a fright he would look in civilized clothes, how awkward he would feel among folk and houses, or how such dear illusions would be shattered if ever my cynical relations saw him eat. He is a Baptist, and by his convictions liable to wed in store clothes, with a necktie like a boot-

lace, and number twelve kid gloves, taking his honeymoon as a solemnity at the very loudest hotel in San Francisco. Preferring plague, pestilence, famine, battle, murder, and sudden death, to such festivities, I pleaded our poverty, and dire need of keeping free from debt. Although born in the Labrador, he had been a cow-boy in Texas for half his working life. As a stockman, he was to wed a rancher's widow. Was he ashamed of his business? No, proud as Lucifer! Was he ashamed of the dress of his trade? Not by a damned sight! Soldiers and sailors are proud to wear the dress of their trade when they marry. "So are cow-punchers," said he, with his head in the air. "S'pose we ride to Cariboo City, and get married in that little old log church."

He managed to persuade me; and I consented also to a hunting trip, instead of the usual honeymoon.

When I was well enough for the journey, I rode my colt, and Jesse his demon mare—Jones—my sole rival, I think, except that dreadful bear, in his affections. Two pack-ponies carried our camp and baggage, and each night he would set up a little tent for me, bedding himself down beside the fire. At the end of five days' journey, we rode at dusk into Cariboo.

Captain Taylor, of Hundred Mile House, and Pete Mathson, the *cargador* of the Star Pack-train, two old stanch friends of Jesse, witnessed our marriage in the quaint log building which served the Cariboo miners as church and schoolhouse. The Reverend Cyril Redfern, pioneer and missionary, read the service, while our ponies waited just outside the door. Jesse wore his plain old leather shaps, a navy blue shirt, a scarf of ruby silk against his tanned neck, and golden Mexican spurs—his dearest treasure. He must have known he looked magnificent, for he carried himself with such quiet dignity, and his deep voice thrilled me, for it was music. I could hardly respond for crying, and would gladly have been alone afterward in the church that I might thank God for all His mercy.

Captain Taylor is a retired naval officer, a pioneer of the gold mines, a magistrate, a man to trust, and when he gave me his heartfelt congratulations, it was not without knowledge of Jesse's character. He and Pete, the *cargador,* rode with us to the camp of his Star Pack-train, and it was there in the forest that we ate our wedding breakfast. The blue haze of Indian summer, the serene splendor of the sunlit woods, and autumn snow on all the shining hills—

such was our banquet hall, and a rippling brook our orchestra. We drank healths in champagne from tin cups, and then, saddling up, Jesse and I rode away alone into the solitudes.

CHAPTER IV

THE LANDLORD

Kate's Narrative

OF his life before he reached this province Jesse will so far tell me nothing, yet his speech betrays him, for under the vivid dialect of the stock range, there is a streak of sailor, and beneath that I detect traces of brogue which may be native perhaps to Labrador. Out of a chaos of books he has picked words which pleased him, pronounced of course to suit himself, and used in some sense which would shock any dictionary.

His manners and customs, too, are a field for research. Of course one expects him to be professional with rope, gun, and ax, but how did he learn the rest? I wanted a lantern—he made one; my boot was torn—he made one; my water-proof coat was ruined—he made one; and if I asked for a sewing-machine, he would refuse to move camp until he had

one finished. If his name were not Smith I could prove him directly descended from the Swiss family Robinson. If a project sounds risky, I have to assume that it is something unusually safe, as the only way to keep him out of danger. If I should ever wish to be a widow, I have only to doubt his power to fly without wings.

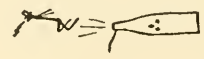
Our journey last autumn led us into most awesome recesses of the coast range. Heads of the sea fiords lay dismal among crowding glaciers, white cataracts came roaring down through belt after belt of clouds, to where a grim surf battled with black rocks. In that dread region of avalanche and rock-slide, of hanging ice-cliffs, roaring storms, ear-shattering thunder, our camp seemed too frail a thing to claim existence, our thread of smoke a little prayer for mercy. "Nary a dollar in sight," was Jesse's comment. "Such microbes don't breed here. D'ye think they'll ever vaccinate agin selfishness, Kate? That plague kills more souls than smallpox."

Guided by his uncanny woodcraft, I began to meet the parishioners, mountain sheep and goats, the elk and cariboo, eagles, bears, wolverines, and certainly I shared something of Jesse's untiring delight

in all wild creatures. Even when we needed meat in camp, and some plump goose or mallard was at the mercy of his gun, Jesse would sometimes beg the victim off, and catch more trout. "So long as they don't hunt us," he would say, "I'd rather tote your camera than my gun. But thar's that dog-gone beaver down the crick, he tried to bite me yesterday again. If he don't tame himself, I'll slap his face. Thinks he's editor."

Were there no clouds, would we realize that the sky is blue? If no little misunderstandings had risen above our horizon, would Jesse and I have realized our wedded happiness? How should I know when I read his pocket diary, what was meant by "one night out. Took Matilda," or "Matilda and Fussy to-night," or "marched with Harem!" Matilda and Fussy if you please, are blankets, and the Harem is his winter camp equipment.

What would you think if you found this in a book?



He says it means, "Eating-house woman chasing—Jesse galloping—home dead finish."

And some of it is worse!

I dare not accuse my dear man of being narrow-minded. I have no doubt that he is quite justified in his intense antipathy to niggers, dagos, and chinks —indeed, he will not allow my Chinese servant on the ranch. But if I wished to uncork a choice vintage of stories, I alluded to his prejudice against the word "grizzly" as applied to his pet bear.

"Now that's whar yo're dead wrong." He threw a log of cedar upon our camp altar, making fresh incense to the wild gods. "The landlord's a silver-tip, fat as butter. Down in the low country, whar feed is mean, and Britishers around, the b'ars is poor, and called grizzlies. I'd be shamed to have a grizzly on my ranch. Come to think, though, Kate, the landlord was a sure-enough grizzly three years back. He'd had misfortunes."

"Tell me." As he stirred the fire, gathering his thoughts, I watched the cedar sparks, a very torchlight procession of fairies flowing upward into the darkness overhead.

"Wall, you see, he and the landlady was always around same as you and me, but not together. No. Being respectable b'ars they'd feed at opposite ends of the pasture."

"But don't the married couples live together?"

"None. They feels it ain't quite modest to make a show of their marriage. You see, Kate, after all, these b'ars is not like us but sort of foreigners. Mother gets kind of secluded when there's cubs, 'cause father's so careless and eats 'em."

"How disgusting!"

"I dunno. Time I speak of, their three young lady b'ars was married somewheres up in the black pines, whar it takes say fifty square miles to feed one silver-tip—and no tourists to help out in times of famine. That country was gettin' over-stocked, with a high protective tariff agin cañon b'ars.

"And here's the landlady down on our ranch, chuck full of fiscal theories. 'B'ars is good,' says she, 'the more cubs the merrier,' says she, 'let's be fruitful and multiply.' And it's only a two b'ar ranch. Thar ain't no England handy whar she can dump spare cubs.

"So the landlord gets provident and eats the cubs. Naturally thar's a sort of coolness arises over that, so that she's feeding north, while he's around south. Then the salmon season happens. There's only two fishing rocks in our reach, the same being close together. The landlord, he fishes at the back-water

rock. The landlady fishes at the rapids rock. They has to pretend they've not been introjuiced.

"There's been heavy rains, and up on the edge of the bench I seen a new crack opening across Apex Rock. I'd have put up a danger notice, only these people thinks it's for scratching their backs on. There's the crack getting wider, and the landlady fishing right underneath, and me hollerin,' but she's too full of pride to care about my worries. So I thinks maybe if I just drop her a hint she'll begin to set up and take notice. I run home for my rifle, posts myself at big pine, takes a steady bead, and lets fly, knocking a salmon out of the lady's mouth. Then I remembers that the shock of a gunshot is enough to loose the end of Apex Rock. It does, and while the scenery is being rearranged, the landlady sets up, wondering what's the trouble. When the dust clears, Apex Rock up here is reduced to a stump; down thar by the rapids the fishing rock's extended with additions; the landlord's a widower, running for all he's worth; and the landlady is no more—not enough left of her to warrant funeral obsequies."

"Why is the landlord called Eph?"

"Christian name. Most b'ars is Ephraim, but

he's Ephrata which means 'be open.' I tried to get him to be open with me instead of stealing chickens. That's when the bad year come."

"Were you in difficulties?"

"Eph was. Them canneries down to salt water, had fished the Fraser out, and the hatchery didn't get to its work until the fourth year, when the new spawn come back to their home river. Yes, and the sarvis berries failed. I dunno why, but the silvertips of this district ain't partial to the same kinds of feed as they practises in Montana and Idaho. Down south they'll lunch on grubs, ants, or dog-tooth violets, but Eph ain't an original thinker. He runs to application, and shies at new ideas. He'd vote conservative. So when the salmon and berries went back on him, he sort of petered out. He come to the cabin and said, plain as talk, he was nigh quitting business."

"But, Jesse! A starving gr—I mean b'ar. Weren't you afraid even then?"

"Why for? My pardner attends to his business, and don't interfere with my hawss ranch. He owns the grubs, berries, salmon, wild honey and fixings. I owns the grass, stock, chickens, and garden sass. When we disagreed about them cabbages, I shot

holes in his ears until he allowed they was mine. His ears is still sort of untidy. As to his eating Sarah, wall, I warned her not to tempt poor Eph too much."

"Sarah?"

"Jones' foal. Being a fool runs in her family. Wall, Sarah died, and cabbages was gettin' seldom, and Eph was losing confidence in my aim, although I told him I'm tough as sea beef."

"He did attack you then?"

"Not exactly. His acts might have been misunderstood, though. Seemed to me it was time to survey the pasture, and see how much in the way of grub could be spared to a poor widower. These people eats meat, but they like it butchered for 'em, and ripened. Down at the south end, I spared Eph a family of wolverines, one at a time, to make the rations hold out. He began to get encouraged. Then this place was just humming with rattlesnakes, so Eph and me just went around together so long as the hunting was worth the trouble. I doubt if there's any left."

At that I breathed a sigh of relief.

"Then Eph gets sassy, wanting squir'ls and chipmunks. Now thar I was firm. Every striped var-

mint of 'em may rob my oat sacks, every squir'l may set up and cuss me all day, but they won't get hurt. They scold and swear, but every lil' devil among them knows I like being insulted. Though they has enemies—foxes, mink, skunk, weasel, I fed that lot to Eph, saving the foxes. Tell you, Kate, the landlord began to get so proud he wouldn't know me."

"Your great eagles, Jesse; they kill squirrels, too."

"That's a fact. If I shot the eagles, them squir'ls would get too joyful. Eagles acks as a sort of religion to squir'ls, or they'd forget their prayers. The next proposition was cougars."

"Oh, I'm glad you killed them. At the old ranch I was so terrified I'd lie awake all night."

"And you a musician! Now that's curious. You like lil' small cats, only one foot from top to tip, although I own they're songsters for their size. But a nine foot cougar, with a ten-thousand cat-power voice, composing along as he goes, why he's full of music. Now I was goin' to propose a cougar opera troupe. They'd knock the stuffing out of that Wagner, anyway."

"Not for me, dear. You see, there's trade rivalry. I wish you had shot them."

"I'm sort of sorry. Many's the time, camped on

your bench land, which I own is a good place for cougars, I'd set up half the night to listen. They'd come purring so close I could see their eyes glint. Seemed to me they sat round on their tails and purred because they liked a camp whar there was no gun-smell. They sang love songs, big war songs, and all kinds of music. Fancy you bein' scared!

"Kill them? They're hard to see as ghosts, and every time you fire they just get absent. That ain't the reason though, for if the landlord wanted cat's meat, I'd like to see the fight."

"They'd never dare to fight that giant bear!"

"I dunno. Eph ain't lost no cougars. He treats them as total strangers.

"But the real reason I fed no mountain-lions to Eph is mostly connected with sheep. Cougars does a right smart business in sheep, 'specially Surly Brown's. Sheep is meaner's snakes, sheepmen is meaner'n sheep, and if the herders disagrees with the cougars, give me the cougars. Sheepmen is dirt."

There spoke the unregenerate cow-boy!

"But, Jesse dear, are you sure that Eph won't expect me to be 'spared' next time he's hungry?"

"Why, no. He was raised respectable, and

there's a proper etiquette for b'ars on meeting a lady. It's sort of first dance-movements:—'general slide, pass the cloak-room, and whar's my little home?' "

Jesse's Note

N. B.—Kate and me agrees that the next chapter has to be cut out, being dull. It's all about the barn-raising after we got home to the ranch. The neighbors put us up a fine big cabin connecting to the old one by a covered porch of cedar shakes. That's where the fire-wood lives, the water-butt, the grindstone, which Kate says is exactly like my singing voice, likewise the ax and saw.

Of course our house-raising was a celebration, with a dance, camp-fire, water-butt full of punch, and headaches. I bet five dollars I was the only semaphore signaler in our district, and lost it to Iron Dale, who learned signaling five years ago during the Riel rebellion. Cap Taylor put up a signal system for our use, of fires by night or big smokes by day. One means a celebration, two means help, and three means war. The women beat the men at tug-of-war, but that was due to the widow's wooden leg being a rallying point for the battle.

Eph being holed up for the winter, I got more popular.

After the celebration we settled for the winter, and I put all the ponies except Jones and the sleigh team down in the cañon pasture. That made the ranch sort of lonesome, but we're short of hay on account of the wedding-trip. We're broke.

CHAPTER V

THE ILLUSTRIOUS SALVATOR

Jesse's Letter

MOTHER, I'm married. I thought I'd got bliss by the horns, but seems I've not roped what I throwed for, and what I've caught is trouble. I wish you weren't in Heaven, which feels kind of cold and distant when a fellow's lonesome. Nobody loves me, and the mosquitoes has mistook me for a greenhorn.

I can't smoke in the lady's home, and when it's forty below zero outside, a pipe clogs with ice from your breath. Chewing is worse, because she cried. She don't need my guns, saddles, and me, or any sort of litter whar she beds down, and my table manners belongs under the table. Men, she says, feeds sitting down, so they won't be mistook for animals, which stand up.

Loyal Englishmen like the late Trevor now frying, has a cold bath every morning, specially in win-

ter, which throws a surprising light upon his last symptoms. It's that frozen manner and pyjamas, which makes the Englishman so durned popular. If I belonged to the episcopal sect, wearing a coat in the house instead of out-of-doors, and used pink tooth-paste instead of yellow soap, maybe I'd like my hash with curry powder, and have some hope of going, when I die, to parts of Heaven where the English keeps open windows, instead of open house. Meanwhile I jest moved back into the old cabin with Mick,—he's wagging himself by the tail between my legs to say as this writing habit is a vice. If I'd only a bottle of whisky now I'd be good, but as it's eighty miles to refreshments, he's got to put up with vice.

This here storm has been running the province since Monday, and making itself at home as if it had come to stay. Put your nose to the door and it's froze, so it's no fun crossing to the stable. I just got back. Horses like to lick white men because we taste salt from eating so much in our bacon, but that mare Jones takes liberties in kicking me through the door when she knows durned well it's shut.

Mrs. Trevor's husband was an opera singer which mislaid his vocal cords, so settled here to be on his romantic lonesome, and spite his wife. He went

loco, and mistook her for a bear; she broke her ankle stampeding; and I took an interest, he shooting me up considerable until he met with an accident. Then his widow married me, and I'm plumb disheartened.

II

I was cooking slapjacks, which gives quick satisfaction for the time invested, when Iron Dale rolled in on his way home. Says my high-grade slapjacks is such stuff as dreams are made of. With him quoting Scripture like that I got suspicious about his coming around by this ranch, instead of hitting straight for Sky-line. On that he owns up to something dam curious and disturbing to my fur. Thar's a stranger at Hundred Mile House, claiming he's come from London, England, to find my wife.

On the stage sleigh from Ashcroft this person got froze, which mostly happens to a tenderfoot, who'd rather freeze like a man than run behind like a dog. So of course he comes in handy for poor Doc McGee. Our people being hale and artful as bears, McGee would be out of practise altogether but for such, so I hope he'll make good out of this here perishable stranger, the same being a useful absentee from my

ranch. He's got a sort of puppy piano along, which grieves me to think our settlers must be getting out of date with such latest improvements, and other settlements liable to throw dirt in our face. Puppy pianos which tinkle isn't priced yet in the Hudson's Bay store catalog. Seems it's called harpsecord, and this person plays it night and day, so that the ranch hands is quitting, and Cap Taylor charges him double money for board. I wonder what he wants with my wife, anyhow. The missus wants me to take the sleigh and collect him. I dunno but seems to my dim intellecks that would be meeting trouble half-way, besides robbing the doctor and Capt. Taylor who done me no harm.

III

This morning, after rigging a life-line to the stable because of this continuing blizzard, I went to the lady's home. She showed me a letter Dale brought, in eytalian, which says the swine proposes to kiss her feet, and wallow in divine song, etc. His name is Salvator, so he's a dago. She, being white, can't have any truck with such, being the same specie as niggers, so that's all right. Seems the puppy piano is for her from her beloved maestro, another

swine from the same litter. She's singing now, and it goes through my bones. Her voice is deep as a man's, strong as Fraser Rapids, and I own that puppy piano appeals to my best instinks. As for me, my name's mud, and she treads in it.

IV

The wind went chasing after the sun, leaving peace and clear stars, so this morning it must be sixty below zero by the way the logs are splitting. At noon Tearful George transpires, dumping the puppy piano, and the swine with his nose in a muff. Tearful had capsized the sleigh over stumps to make his passenger run instead of arriving here like frozen meat, but appears it hadn't done the harpsecord no good. He said he'd roll his tail before any more music broke out, so didn't stay dinner. The swine was down on one knee in front of the missus, slobbering over her hand. She was kneading doe at the time, and there's some on his nose.

He's got an angels-ever-bright-and-fair expression, smiles to turn milk, dog's eyes, and a turn-down collar. He calls her Donner Addoller-r-r-ra-ta, and looks as if he hadn't had much to eat on the trail with Tearful, though they'd camped at

Widow O'Flynn's where pie occurs whenever her Billy's to home.

Kate's pleased all to pieces. Seems this gent in the paper collar has wrote an opera, and there's a party goes by the name of Impress Ario, song and dance artist, putting it on the stage at London, England. The leading woman sings base, and that's why Kate is wanted. To the only woman on earth who sings base enough, they sends this dingus and the organ-grinder. She says it's a business proposition with money in it, and wants me to come along to the Old Country. She'd have me in a collar and chain with a pink bow at my off ear, promenading in Strand Street.

She's been having a rough time here, mostly living on wild meat, without money or servants. I'd like well to see her happier; I know her music belongs to the whole world, and I've no right to hold her for any selfishness. If it's up to her to go, it's agin me to look pleased, and she shall go the day I believe in her call.

She and the tinkle dingus and the swine are at it full blast. He's screeching nil desperandum, she's thundering "Shut-ut the dooroh!" "Ting ting tong banggo!" says the puppy piano, while Mick in here

howls like a moonstruck wolf. I dunno, but seems to me that when you're out at night between the stars and the mountains and the river praising God in the cañon, there's music reaching from your soul to the Almighty, and peace descending right out of Heaven. Oh, Lord, speak to my wife, and tell her there's more love right here, than in all the sham passions of all the damned operas put together. But now she's following after vain swine.

V

I made the dago bed down in here, but he flopped over to breakfast and they've been at it hammer and tongs ever since. "Tinkie tankie ping ping pee-chee-ree-ho-O! Oh! Oho! me-catamiaou-ow-yow." Cougars is kittens to it, but I'm durned ignorant, and I notice that the signor looked on while she washed up.

I didn't sorrow with Kate persuading me to drive them as far as Hundred Mile. The sound of her voice stampedes me every time, but when the dago tries to stroke my ears, he was too numerous, so I held his head in the bucket until he began to subside. I don't take to him a whole lot.

From when I'd finished the horses, till nigh on

sundown, the music tapered off, and I got more and more rattled. At last I walked right in.

She'd a black dress, indecent round the shoulders, and a bright star on her brow. She stood with the swine's arms around her, until at the sight of me he shrank off, guilty as hell. There was nary a flicker of shame or fear to her, but she just stood there looking so grand and beautiful that my breath caught in my throat. "Why, Jesse," she said, her voice all soft with joy, "I'm so glad you've come to see. It's the great scene, the renunciation. Come, Salvator, from 'Thy people shall be—' "

I twisted him by the ear into my cabin, he talking along like a gramophone. I set him down on the stool, myself on the bunk, inspecting him while I cut baccy, and had a pipe. If I let him fight me with guns, she'd make a hero of him. If I hoofed him into the cold or otherwise wafted him to the dago paradise, she'd make a villain of me.

"You wrote an opery," says I.

He explains with his tongue, his eyes, and both paws waving around for the time it takes to boil eggs. I'm not an egg.

"You give the leading woman a base voice?"

He boiled over some more.

"So you got an excuse for coming."

He spread out over the landscape.

"Thinkin'," sez I, "that she'd nothin' more than Trevor to guard her honor."

More talk.

"But you found her married with a man."

He wanted to go alone to civilization.

"You stay here," I says, "and Salvator, you're going to earn your board."

VI

I ain't claiming that this Salvator actually earned his grub this month. He can clean stables now without being kicked into a curry hash; he can chop water holes through ice, and has only parted with one big toe up to date; he can buck fire-wood if I tend him with spurs and quirt; but his dish-washing needs more rehearsals, and he ain't word perfect yet at scrubbing floors. He's less fractious and slothful since he was up-ended and spanked in presence of a lady, but on the other hand, there's a lack of joy, cheerfulness, and application. He's too full of dumb yearnings, and his pure white soul seems to worry him, but then there's bucking horses for him to ride

in spring, and first exercises in bears. My bear had ought to be a powerful tonic.

I sent a cable message by Tearful George to the song and dance artist who's running the swine's opery, just inquiring if he'd remitted Salvator to collect my wife. The reply is indignant to say that the swine is a liar. Likewise there's a paragraph in the Vancouver papers about the illustrious young composer, Salvator Milani, who's disappeared, it seems, into the wilds. His wife is desolated, his kids is frantic, the Salvatori, a musical society, is offering rewards, which may come in useful, and the rest of mankind throws fits. This paper owns up that the departed is careless and absent-minded, and I just pause to observe that he hasn't made my bed. He'll have some quirt for supper.

As to my wife, she'd never believe that the swine wasn't sent to fetch her, or that he's deserted his wife and family. She thinks he's a little cock angel, and me a cock devil. She'll have to find him out for herself.

VII

My wife has run away with him.

VIII

I could pick stars like apples. Here's me with my pipe and dog in my home, and my dear wife content. The Dook of London has no more, except frills. I hardly know whar to begin, 'cept whar I left off without mentioning how they run away. The illustrious didn't have the nerve, so it was my lady who stole over to stable in the dead of night, and harnessed the team so silent I never woke. She drove off with her trunks, the puppy piano, and her swine, on a bitter night with eighty mile ahead before she'd get any help if things went wrong. She has the pure grit, my great thoroughbred lady, and it makes me feel real good to think of the way she followed her conscience along that unholy trail through the black pines.

By dawn she put up for breakfast at O'Flynn's. The widow had broke her leg reproaching a cow, and sent off her son to the carpenter at Hundred and Fifty Mile House to get the same repaired. Her bed was beside the stove, with cord-wood, water, and grub all within reach. It was real awkward though that the stove had petered out, and the water bucket froze solid while she slept, so she was expecting to be wafted before her son got home, when Kate ar-

rived in time to save her from Heaven. The signor volunteers to make fire and cook grub while Kate fed and watered the team, so my wife has the pleasure of chopping out a five-foot well at Bent Creek, while this unselfish cavalierio stayed in the house and got warm. Naturally he didn't know enough to light the stove, until the widow threw things, and he got the coal-oil. Then he disremembered how to soak the kindlings before he struck a match, so he lit the fuel first, then stood over pouring oil from the five-gallon can. When the fire lep' up into the can, of course he had to let go, and when he seen the cabin all in flames, he galloped off to the woods, leaving the Widow O'Flynn to burn comfy all by herself.

By the time Kate reaches the cabin, the open door is all flames; but, having the ice ax, she runs to the gable end, and hacks in through the window. The bed's burning quite brisk by then, but the widow has quit out, climbed to the window and gone to sleep with the smoke, so that Kate climbs in and alights on top of her sudden. The fire catches hold of my wife, but she swings the widow through the window, climbs out, lights on top of her again, then takes a roll in the snow.

When the illustrious comes out of the woods to explain, d'ye think she'd listen? I can just see him explaining with dago English, paws, shoulders, and eyes. She leaves him explaining in front of the burning cabin. Three days from now young O'Flynn will ride home with his mother's limb tied to the saddle strings, and if the swine's alive then, he'll begin explaining again, though Billy's quick and fretful with his gun.

My wife humped this widow to the barn, and got warm clothes from her trunks for both of them. She fired out her baggage and the puppy piano, bedded down the widow in clean hay, hitched up the team, and hit the trail for home.

She hadn't a mile to go before she met me, and what with the smoke from O'Flynn's, the widow in the rig, and the complete absence of the swine, I'd added up before she reined her team. She would want to cry in my arms.

So she's in bed here, her burns dressed with oil from a bear who held me up once on the Sky-line trail. It's good oil. The widow's asleep in my cabin, and I'm right to home with this letter wrote to you, Mother. I guess you know, Mummy, why me and

my pipe and my dog are welcome now, which you've lived in your time and loved.

So hoping you're in Heaven, as this leaves me at present. Yr. affect. son,

JESSE.

CHAPTER VI

ROBBERY-UNDER-ARMS

Kate's Narrative

WE have started a visitor's book. It opens with press cuttings of interviews with Professor Bohns, the famous archæologist, who came to examine the paleolithic deposits at South Cave. Next are papers relating to a summons for assault, brought by the late Mr. Trevor against J. Smith. There is a letter from a big game hunter, Sir Turner Rounde, who came up the cañon collecting specimen pelts of *ursus horribilis,* which Jesse maintains is not a grizzly bear. But the gem of our collection is a letter of lengthy explanation from an eminent Italian cur, who spent a whole month at the ranch last winter. Nobody is more hospitable, or more hungry for popularity than my dear man, but I think that special prayers should be offered for his visitors. He has a motto now:—"Love me: love my bear, not my missus."

My jealous hero has told the story of an old admirer, once my fellow-student, who brought me a dumpy piano for which I had so starved, told me the news, talked shop, and would make me a prima donna—my life's ambition. The trap was well baited. Lonely, and terrified by the dread majesty of winter, I craved for the lights, for the crowds, for my home, for my people, for my art. And there are little things besides which mean so much to a woman.

Salvator turned out to be a cur, his mission despicable, and yet no woman born can ever be without some little tenderness for one whose love misleads him. And I who sought to read a lesson to poor Jesse, learned one for myself. I am no longer free, but fettered, and proud of the chains, Love's chains, worth more to me than that lost world.

And yet I wonder if in Heaven there are blessed but weak little souls like mine, which grow weary at times of the harps, chafed by their crowns of glory, bored to tears with bliss, ready to give it all up just for a nice gossip. That would be human.

Where spring has come like a visitation of angels, where winter's loneliness is changing to summer's happy solitude, I look into mirror pools, and see contentment. Oh, how can civilized people realize the

wonder and glamour of this paradise? Up in the black pines it is winter still, but all our towered, bayed, sculptured, sunny precipice is alive with flowers and birds, while the slopes at the foot of the wall are white with the blossom of wild orchards. Here our bench pasture is a little sky with marigolds for stars. Down in the lower cañon the trees are in summer leaf. The canaries are nesting, the humming-birds have just come, the bees are having a wedding, just as Mendelssohn told us, and Jesse and I are quite ashamed of ourselves, because the widow's reproachful eyes have found us out. We are not really and truly grown up.

Why should the poor sour woman be afraid of fairies? But then you see I was dreadfully afraid of the landlord, until, emerging gaunt and haggard from his winter sleep, Eph came to inquire for treacle. He had a dish of golden syrup, bless him, and no baby short of nine feet from tip to tip, could ever have got himself in such a mess. He still thinks I'm rather dangerous.

One morning, it must have been the twenty-sixth, I think, we had a caller, destined, I fear, to entry in our visitor's book. Jesse had ridden off to see how his ponies thrive on the new grass, Mrs. O'Flynn

was redding up after breakfast, and finding myself in the way, I took my water colors down to Apex Rock, to see if one sketch would hold winter, spring, summer, as viewed from the center of wonderland.

Now our house being in full view from the apex, and sound traveling magically in this clear atmosphere, I heard voices. Mrs. O'Flynn had a visitor, and I was in such a jealous hurry to share the gossip, that my sketch went over the cliff as I rose to run. A rather handsome man, in the splendid cow-boy dress, stood by a chestnut gelding, such a horse aristocrat that I made sure he must sport a coat of arms. Moreover, in a gingerly and reluctant way, as though under orders, he was kissing Mrs. O'Flynn. She beamed, bless her silly old heart!

Mrs. O'Flynn looks on her truthfulness as a quality too precious for every-day use, and so carefully has it been preserved that in her fifty-fourth year it shows no signs of wear. Hence, on reaching the house I was not surprised to find that her visitor was a total stranger.

From chivalrous respect for women—the species being rare on the stock range—cow-boys are shy, usually tongue-tied. In a land where it is accounted ill-bred to ask a personal question, as, for instance, to

inquire of your guest his name, where he comes from, or whither he is bound, cow-punchers take a pride in their reticence. They never make obvious remarks, ask needless questions, or interfere with matters beyond their concern.

In the cattle country a visitor asked to dismount, makes camp or house his home, never suggesting by word or glance a doubt that he is welcome to water, pasturage, food, shelter, and warmth, so long as he needs to stay. I had not invited this man to dismount.

Judged by these signs—chivalry, reticence, courtesy—Mrs. O'Flynn's guest was not a cow-boy. His florid manners, exaggerated politeness, and imitation of our middle-class English speech stamped him bounder, but not of the British breed. Later, in moments of excitement, he spoke New York, with a twang of music-hall.

Even in so lonely a place it is curious to remember that such a person should appeal to me. Still in his common way the man had beauty, carried his clothes well, moved with grace. So much the artist in me saw and liked, but I think no woman could have seen those tragic eyes without being influenced.

"Ah! Mrs. Smith, I believe?" He stood uncovered.

"May I venture to ask if your husband is at home? I think I had the pleasuah of knowing him years ago down in Texas."

"He'll be back by noon."

"Thank you, madam. Fact is, we were very much surprised to see your chimney smoke. We thought this exquisite place was quite unoccupied. Indeed!"

"Who's 'we'?"

"Oh, we're the outfit riding for General Schmidt. We've come in search of the spring feed. We were informed that Ponder's place was unoccupied, open to all. Am I mistaken in supposing that this is Ponder's place?"

"It is."

"Er—may I venture to ask if your husband holds squatter's rights, or has the homestead and preemption?"

"You may ask my husband."

"Thank you, madam. Our foreman instructed me to say that if the place proved to be occupied, I was to ask terms for pasturage. We've only two hundred head."

"Mr. Smith will consider the matter."

"We're camped in a little cave at the south end of the bench, deuced comfortable."

Of course I know I'm a fool, and expect to be treated as such. But this man claimed to have camped at the South Cave without passing this house, which was impossible.

"Camped at South Cave?" said I. "In that event I need not detain you. Mr. Smith no doubt will call on you after dinner. Good morning, sir."

But this was not to his mind, and I gathered vaguely that my husband was not really wanted at the Bar Y camp. I even suspected that this visitor would rather deal with me than see my husband. It required more than a hint to secure his departure.

Jesse returned at noon. He had set off singing, but at dinner he was so thoughtful that he never even noticed my casserole, a dish he was expected to enjoy, and when he tried afterward to light an empty pipe, I saw that there was something wrong. He received the story of our caller with the noises of one displeased. "That visitor, Kate," he summed up, "would make a first-class stranger. Knew me, you say, in Texas?"

Hearing from her kitchen Mrs. O'Flynn's sharp grunt of dissent, I closed the door.

"You've left the key-hole open," said Jesse, rising from the table, "come for a walk."

"Now, Kate dear," Jesse sat down beside me on the Apex Rock, "this morn you got your first lesson in robbers. How would you like a visit to old Cap Taylor at Hundred Mile?"

My voice may have quivered just a little. "Danger?" I asked.

"I dunno as there's actual danger, but if I jest *knowed* you was safe, I'd be free to act prompt."

"Tell me everything, Jesse."

"Up at the north end of the bench, there's maybe two hundred head of strange cattle. One pedigree short-horn bull is worth all of twenty-five hundred dollars, and there's a Hereford stud I'd take off my hat to anywheres. There's Aberdeens or Angus—I get them poll breeds mixed—and a bunch of Jerseys grazing apart, purty as deer. Anyways, that herd's worth maybe two hundred thousand dollars, every hoof of 'em stolen, and if you raked all them millionaire ranches in California I doubt you'd get that value."

"How do you know they're stolen?"

"No stock owner needs that amount of stud cattle. We don't raise such in the north, so they've been drifted in here from the States. They're gaunt with famine and driving, and it beats me to think

how many more's been left dead crossing the Black Pine country. The Bar Y brands has been faked. The parties herding 'em waits till I'm away, and tries to make a deal with you for pasturage. The gent with the sad eyes is sent dressed up to fool a woman."

"But how could even robbers collect such a wonderful herd?"

"Kate, in them western states there's just about four hundred cow thieves working together, which you'll see them advertised in the papers robbing coaches, trains, pay for mining-camps, or now and again some bank. Still that's just vacations, and the main business is lifting cattle.

"Ye see, Kate, they'd collect an occasional stud, such as these here imported thoroughbreds, too good to lose, too well-known to sell, too hot to hold. They'd keep 'em in some hid-up pasture. But sometimes the people prods the sheriffs to get a move on, or Uncle Sam sends pony soldiers to play hell with the sovereign rights of them holy western states. Then the robbers is apt to scatter down in store clothes, for a drunk at 'Frisco. This time I seen in the papers that Uncle Sam is rounding up his rob-

bers, so naturally the pick of their stealings requires hiding. They'd drive north for the British possessions, but on the plains there's too much mounted police, whereas this British Columbia has one district constable to a district the size of the old country. Yes, they'd come to this province, and this here ranch of ours is a sort of North Pole to the stock range. Since old man Ponder quit out, and I squatted, only the neighbors know that the ranch is claimed.

"Now, Kate," his great strong arm closed round me like a vise. "The hull country knows you're clear grit, so there's no shame in leaving. For my sake, dear—"

"Do you think I'd leave you in danger?"

He sighed. "I knew it. I cayn't help it, and, Kate, it's the truth, I'd rather see you dead than scared. There's Madam Grizzly, and Señora Cougar, there's Lady Elk, and even Mrs. Polecat, brave as lions. I'd hate to have my mate the only one to run like a scalded cat."

"The program, Jesse?"

"Do you remember, Kate, how we lost five dollars finding out that Dale and me is signalers?"

"And Captain Taylor gave us the signals to raise the district: one fire for feasts, two for help, three for war!"

"That's it, little woman. By dusk I'll be on top of the cliffs, and make my fires back from the rim-rock, where them robbers won't see the glare."

CHAPTER VII

THE ROUND-UP

Jesse's Narrative

WHILE I made signal fires on the top of the cliff, Mr. Robber came to find out from my wife why for I hadn't called to leave my card at the South Cave. He's picturesque, says she, hair like a raven's wing, eyes steel-blue, scarf indigo striped with orange, shirt black silk, woolly shaps out of a Wild West show, gold and silver fixings, Cheyenne saddle, carbine of some foreign breed, or maybe a Krag, manners fit for a king, age thirty-four, height six feet two inches, chest only thirty-eight, and such a sad smile—all of this will be useful to the police.

He tried all he knew to get out of being photographed, which I wisht I'd been there, for it must have been plumb comic, but we all submits when Kate gets after us. That reminds me that if he can't capture the camera and plate, we're apt to be burnt out by accident.

She led him on and made him talk. If his boss knew how much Kate has down in her note-book, this guy with the sad eyes would get kicked all round the pasture. When I axed if the robber made love to her, my wife just laughed, and turned away, telling me not to be a fool; but the blush came round her neck.

I dunno. Perhaps it's my liver, so I'm taking the only medicine I have, which it tastes like liniment. Is it liver, or am I getting to dislike this person?

II

So happens, while I was writing, Billy O'Flynn comes along with the pack outfit on his way to Sky-line. He wanted to know why I made them fires, so I explained I was making a clearing up thar for Kate's spring chrysanthemums. (She spelt that word, which had me bogged down to the hocks.) It may be liver, or my squeam inflamed, but my mind ain't easy, and the Sky-line folk may think I'm only joshing with them fires.

I can't leave Kate to ride for help, I can't shift her, I can't send Billy to the constable without breaking my contract with the Sky-line, and I don't

divulge nothin' to William O'Flynn, Esquire, who talks to the moon rather than waste conversation.

If I make a letter for Dale, and slip it into the pouch, Billy won't know, or gossip if he happens to meet in with stray robbers. I'll get him up and off by midnight to the Sky-line, in time for the supper pies, and the boys will be surging down to the ferry before to-morrow midnight. Now I must make up some lies to hasten Billy's timid footsteps along the path of duty.

III

Billy hastened away at midnight to tell Dale that pigeon's milk is selling at eighty-four and three-fourths. He believes that if he can get that secret intelligence to Iron in good time, he's to share the profits. Fact is, that Iron's late wife made him the laughing-stock of the plains over some joke she put up on him connected with pigeon's milk, so that Billy's share of the profits will be delivered on the toe of Dale's boot. He's breaking records to make the Sky-line quick.

Nothing happened this morning, except Bull Durham, calling himself Brooke. He, the gent with the

sad eyes, who came to make love to my wife. He paid me one hundred dollars for pasturage. Then I axed him to stay dinner, and Kate says she never seen me so talkative. Bull found out which weeks the Cariboo stage carries specie, and how many thousand dollars a month in amalgam comes down from the Sky-line camp. He even dragged out of me that old Surly Brown, the miser, has fifteen thousand dollars buried under the dirt floor of his cabin—which reminds me that if Brown's home becomes the scene of a mining stampede, I'll have to keep shy of his rifle. I owned up that our provincial constable is in bed with the mumps at Alexandria—temperature of a hundred and six in the shade. I sort of hinted that he was prejudiced agin me for belonging to the Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, and because I was suspected of adopting poor, dumb, driven cattle which had happened to stray within range of my branding-iron. He even learned I'd rode for the Lightning outfit, and from this jumps on to the conclusion I must have belonged once to the Tonto gang of outlaws. This might account for me being hid up here in the British possessions. Our mutual acquaintance, even at Abilene, was all candidates for the gallows, or

such of the dear departed as had been invited to the hereafter by Judge Lynch. Yes, he showed a great gift of faith, and got both his photo and the negative to show there was no ill feeling. I'm pastoral, harmless, simple, raised for a pet.

Leaving Kate hid in a ruined shack, half-way to the ferry, I was down by eleven P. M. to the bank of the river, hailing old man Brown. So soon as he'd brung me acrost, I sent him to ride for all he was worth and collect our constable, which cost me eighteen dollars and a horse. The money is severe, but I'll get even on horse trades.

From midnight to one A. M. I put in the time cussing Dale; from then till two A. M. I felt that nobody loved me; from two A. M. to half past, I was scheming to take the robbers single-handed. At two thirty-five Dale rolled up with nine men from Sky-line, mounted on Billy's ponies, besides O'Flynn, and Ransome Pollock, who may be good for a burnt offering but ain't much use alive.

Of course, having raised the country, I'd got to make good, producing a business proposition and robbers to follow. Iron has no sense of humor anyhow, and can't see jokes unless the prices is wrote plain on their tickets. He's come to this earth after

dollars. If a batch of robbers is liable to cost him fifty dollars a day, and only fetches fifty-one dollars a day on the contract, his mine is better money, so he rolls his tail and takes away his men. That's Iron Dale seven days in the week.

He's right smart, too, at holding a business meeting, so when I'd ate cranberry pie, which is a sort of compliment from the mine, and the boys has some of Brown's tea as a donation from me, the convention sits down solemn to talk robbers.

Moved and seconded that hold-ups ain't encouraged in her majesty's dominions, and we hands these robbers to the constable as his lawful meat, but we got to get 'em first.

Resolved that there's money in it. The owners of them cattle had ought to be grateful and show their gratitude, 'cause otherwise the stock is apt to scatter. Proposed that we hit the trail right away, with Iron Dale for leader. Carried, with symptoms of toothache disabling one of his men.

Dale told off O'Flynn and Branscombe to stampede the cattle just at glint of dawn, sending 'em past the cave, and shooting and yelling as if there was no hereafter. That should interest the robbers, and bring them out of the cave which overlooks our

pasture. Looking down at a sharp angle, they weren't likely to hit our riders, whereas our posse, posted in good cover with a steady aim, could attend to the robbers with promptness and despatch.

Crossing the ferry our main outfit left Billy and Branscombe to start drifting the cattle southward, while we rode on to take up our positions around the cave. With dawn coming on, and Kate alone in that shack, I wanted the boys to gallop, whereas Dale said he'd no use for broken legs. The night was dark as a wolf's mouth.

In the ruined shack, half-way to our home, Kate was to have a candle, screened so that it could only be seen from our trail. As soon as we rose the edge of the bench, and a mile before we would reach the shack, I seen the candle and knew that she was safe. We passed my fence, we crossed the half-mile creek, we gathered speed along the open pasture, and then Kate's yell went through me like a knife. The robbers must have had a man on night herd, and found her by that light!

Dale's hand grabbed my rein, and with a growl he halted our whole outfit. "Steady," says he, "you fool!" Then in a whisper, as his men came crowding in: "Dismount! Ransome, hold horses! Sam,

take three men afoot round the rear of that cabin. I take the rest to close in the front. Siwash, and Nitchie Scott, find enemy's horses and drift them away out of reach. No man to whisper, no man to make a sound, until I lift my hand at that cabin window. After that, kill any man who tries to escape. Get a move on!"

So, with me at his tail, he crept along from cover to cover, waving hand signals to throw his squad into place. The enemy's five horses at the door were led off by Billy's Siwash *arriero,* and Nitchie Scott, so gently that the robbers thought they were grazing. By that time Dale and me was at the window gap on the north side of the shack, but the candle was in our way, we couldn't see through its glow, and it wasn't till we got round to the door hole that we'd a view of what was going on inside.

My wife stood in the nor'west, right, far corner. A man with a gray chin whisker and a mournful smile, with his gun muzzle in her right ear, was shoving her head against the wall. Bull was talking as usual, explaining how his tact was better'n Whiskers' gun at persuading females. Ginger was trying to assuage Bull. The greaser was keeping

a kind of lookout, although he couldn't see from the lighted room into the dark where we was. Ginger clapped his paws over Bull's mouth before the proceedings went on.

"Now," says Whiskers sadly, "are you goin' to scream any more?"

Kate's face was dead white with rage. "You cur," said she, "I screamed because my—you're hurting me, you brute! Leave off if you want to hear one word from me. Leave off! That's better. No, I won't scream again."

The gun sight was tearing her ear as she screwed her head around, looking him full in the eyes. "If you do me any harm," she said, "my husband's friends won't let you off with death. They'll burn you. Stand back, you coward!"

He flinched back just a little, and I saw his hand drawing slowly clear of her head.

"Get your horses," she cried out sharp, "you've barely time to escape!"

Then I fired, the bullet throwing that hand back, so that it contracted on the gun. His revolver shot went through the rear wall. The hand was spoiled.

"Now, hands up, all of you!" Dale yelled.

"Hands up! Drop your guns!" One of the robbers was raising his gun to fire, so I had to kill him. The rest surrendered.

"Kate," said I, sort of quiet, and she came to me.

CHAPTER VIII

THE STAMPEDE

Jesse's Narrative

BEING married to a lady, and full of dumb yearnings for reform, I axed Dale when he was down to Vancouver to dicker for a book on etiquette. *Deportment for Gents* being threw at a policeman and soiled, Dale only paid six bits; but I tossed him double or quits, and come out all right. As to the book, it's wrote mighty high and severe by Professor Aaron E. Honeypott, but when I tried some on my wife she laughed so she rolled on the floor. I know now that when I sweats at a dance I'm not to hang my collar on the chandileer, or press bottled beer on my partner. If ever I get to a town I'm to take the outside of the sidewalk, wipe my gums on the mat, and wash before I use them roller towels. But it doesn't say when I'm to wear my boots inside my pants, or how old Honeypott chews without having to spit, or what to say when Jones kicks me in the morning, or in deadfall tim-

ber, or when a bear dislikes me, or any unusual accident in this vale of tears; and there ain't one word about robbers.

Which these robbers we got in the cave is a disappointment. This old man what leads them with a plume on his face, ought to have more deportment, for screwing a gun in Kate's ear ain't no sort of manners. Even after I'd shot his hand to chips, he grabbed Ransome's gun with his left and tried to make me lie down. There's some folks jest don't know when you give them a hint.

And Bull, with the sad eyes, ought to comport himself around like a Honeypott, seeing the way he was raised, and how he claims on me his ancient friendship. While we lashed his thumbs behind him, he told us he'd been educated at Oxford and Cambridge.

"What!" Kate flashed out, "after leaving Eton and Harrow?"

"Yes, and I've enough education to guess this ain't no way to treat American citizens. You'll hear of this," he shouted, "from Uncle Sam!"

"Thar," says Dale, "I knew there'd be rewards for you, dead or alive. How much? Two thousand dollars a head?"

Then old Whiskers ordered this Bull to shut his head. He's a curious, slow, mournful voice, like a cat with the toothache.

"I demand—"

"Shut up."

So Bull shut up while we lashed him, likewise young Ginger and the greaser. Seeing the fellow I'd killed might want an inquest, we laid him straight in the ruined shack, and then marched our prisoners off to South Cave, where they'll wait until we get our constable to arrest them.

II

Now on the second day after we captures these ladrones, along toward supper, the depositions of the various parties is as follows, viz.:

Up to the ruined shack two mile north of my home, lies the remains of one robber expecting an inquest. Two miles south, right where the upper cliff cuts off the end of our pasture, there's our cave full of captured bandits, to wit; Whiskers, Bull Durham, Ginger, and the dago. Down on the bench in front of the cave is our guard-camp with Iron Dale in command, and Kate with the boys having supper. Right home at the ranch house is me

finishing my chores, and the widow spoiling hash for my supper, because she hates me worse nor snakes for being a Protestant. Away off beyond the horizon is old man Brown cussing blue streaks 'cause he can't find much constable.

Such being the combinations at supper-time, along comes the widow's orphan, young Billy O'Flynn, who handles my pack contract with the Sky-line. He's supposed to be on duty at the guard-camp, and his riding back to the home ranch completely disarranges the landscape. I'm busy, hungry, and expected to take charge of the night guard at the cave, but somehow this Billy attracts my attention by acting a whole lot suspicious. Instead of bringing me some message from Dale, he rides straight to the lean-to kitchen, steps off his pony, and whispers for his mother. I sneaks through the house to the kitchen in time to see this widow with a slip of paper, brown paper what we used to wrap up the prisoners' lunch. At sight of me she gets modest, shoving it into the stove, but I becomes prominent, and grabs it. "Shure," she explains, "an' it's only a schlip av paper!"

Seems to be scratches on the smooth side of this paper, sort of reminding me that Bull has a fountain-

pen sticking out of his vest pocket. If he's been writing with milk, I'd warm the paper—but no, we use canned milk, and haven't got any either. I've heard faintly somewheres of things wrote in spittle, so I pours on a bottle of ink, and rinses the paper in the water-butt. Yes, there's the message plain as print.

"Gun to hand, but cartridges wrong size, no good. Get .45. Billy to wait with ponies under nearest pine N. of cave, when plough above N. Star. Send more gum for chief's wound.—Bull."

Billy was mounting at the door to put out for solitude, but since he knows I can't miss under two hundred yards, he was persuaded to come into the cabin. There I read him some of the etiquette about keeping his temper, and not using coarse language. Also I told him politely what I thought of him, and where he'll go when he dies. He waited, stroking the little fur on his muzzle, till I got through, looking so damned patient with me that I came near handing him one in the eye.

"You invited these robbers to my grass?"

He nodded.

"Thanks to you, my wife had a gun muzzle screwed round in her ear."

"Bet she squinted!" said Billy.

If I lose my temper, I can't shoot, and Billy knew that well. "She's up agin it good and hard," said he.

"Agin what?"

"Making a silk purse out of a sow's ear."

"You lop-eared, mangy, pig-faced, herring-gutted son of a —"

"From the *Etiquette?*" asked Billy. "I don' think much of you, anyway. Mother ain't got no use for you either, or any of the neighbors, you old cow thief!"

Now if Billy talked so big as all that, it must be to astonish his mother. So she must be at the key-hole, and sure enough I heard her grind her stump with the backache from stooping down. Happens Mrs. Smith has a garden squirt which it holds a gallon, so while I kep' young Billy interested with patches of etiquette, I took off the rose, filled the squirt, and let drive through the key-hole into the widow's ear. At that she lifted up her voice and wept.

Feeling better, I resumed the conversation.

"Billy," sez I, smooth as cream, while I filled the squirt, "on the shelf there you'll find a little small bottle." In my dim way I aimed to get him excited, and talkative, divulging secrets with all his heart. Then afterward I'd like him asleep, out of mischief.

"Get your bottle yourself," says he, sort of defiant, so I let drive at him with the squirt.

"If you please," said I, and he got the bottle all right.

"If you don't mind," said I, "will you just draw the cork?"

"And if I won't?"

I took my squirt and watched him pull the cork.

"Thank you," sez I, seeing how beautiful is the uses of true politeness. "Now may I trouble you to spill what's left in the bottle into that there goblet? Now be so kind."

"I refuse!"

The squirt won't scare any more Billy, so I exhibits my gun.

"I regrets to remark, Mr. O'Flynn, that this gun acts sort of sudden."

"Shoot, and you go to jail!"

"But first, my dear young friend, I've time to lop off a few fingers, one at a time—won't miss them all

at once. May I request you to pour out the medicine? No—not on the floor, please, but into the goblet, while I observe that your right thumb seems tender after that cut, and ought to be treated. So, a little more. That's right. Now honor me by adding a little water from the pitcher. Thank you. Thumb feeling easier? Well, that there laudanum soothes the fractious infant, and causes a whole lot of repose. Quite sweet without sugar. Yes, please, you'll lift the goblet to your mouth while I watch that nothing goes wrong with your pug nose. You want to throw back your head, you treacherous swine. Drink, or I'll splash your brains on the floor!"

"I daren't! It's poison!"

"It's bullets—you'd better! Drink, or I'll kill you! Drink! One—two—much obliged, I'm sure. Hope you'll sleep well."

"Curse you!" he shrieked, and flung the glass at my head.

Then down came the widow like a landslide. She scratched my face, confessed my sins, sobbed over her darling Billy *avick,* prescribed for my future, wrung her wet frock, and made a soap emetic for her offspring all at once. It's a sure fact that widow

was plenty busy, and what with slinging that emetic at the patient, and gently introducing the lady to the kitchen cupboard, wall, I declare I didn't have a dull moment. Then distant shots brought us up all standing.

"At last!" Billy shouted, "they're off!"

"Who's off?"

"Father and his men—escaped while I kep' you in talk. Fooled, Jesse! Fooled! I fooled you to the eyes! My father's Larry O'Flynn, Captain Larry O'Flynn, captain of the outlaws!" My, there was pride in the lad! He sat on the table in the dusk, fighting to keep awake, rubbing his eyes with his sleeve. "He's give me leave to join, and I'm hitting the trail to-night—hitting the trail, d'ye hear?" His eyes closed, his voice trailed off to a whisper, and then once more he roused. "I'm a wolf!" he howled. "I come from Bitter Creek! The higher up, the worse the waters, and I'm from the source! Robbery-under-arms, and don't you forget it, Mister Jesse Smith!" He rocked from side to side, gripping hard at the table, muttering threats.

Outside I could hear a rider coming swift, and Dale's voice hailing, "Jesse! Jesse!"

"Jesse," the lad was muttering, "lift his stock, and his woman, burn his ranch, and put his fires out—thatsh the way to—"

Dale had stepped from his horse, and stood in the doorway, making it dark inside. "Where in blazes are you?"

"Look," said I, and Dale watched, for the boy, dead pale, was lurching from side to side, his eyes closed, his lips still moving.

"Only drugged," said I. "Who let them robbers escape?"

"Ransome Pollock," said Dale.

"Who else?"

"Dave."

"How's his poor tooth?" says I, and Dale explained he'd been clubbed.

Young O'Flynn rolled over, and went down smash, so that I had to kneel, and try if his heart was all right. It thumped along steady and give no sign of quitting.

"I had to," said I, "old Whiskers yonder is the widow's husband, and father to this boy. He's clear grit, Iron."

"Where's the widow?"

"Resting." I heard horses come thundering out of the dusk. "Robbers broke south?"

"Yep."

"Hev they grow'd wings?"

"Nope."

"Can't swim the Fraser?"

"Bottled?" said he, cheering up.

"Some," says I. "Not corked yet. You want to make a line here quick, from the foot of the upper cliff to the edge of the river, and each man make three big fires. Then post half your men to tend fires, and the best shots to hold that line with rifles. Them robbers has got to break through when they knows they're cornered. Here's your boys, Iron. Git a move on!"

"That's so," says Dale, and in two shakes of a duck's tail he was throwing his men into line. Seems that some of the boys rode the robbers' horses, and the rest were bareback on my pack-ponies, so Kate had a fine gallop home with the mob. But when she saw what I'd prescribed for Billy's symptoms, she wasn't pleased, and by the time she'd made herself content, I had to be off on duty. Meanwhile the widow, wild and lone, had flew; so that left Kate

without help, her job being coffee to keep the boys awake till we'd daylight to corner the robbers.

Men watching on a strain like that get scary as cats, so by moonset some of our warriors would loose off guns at stumps, trees, rocks, or just because they felt lonesome. After the moon went down, dry fuel got scant, so that the fires waned, and some of our young men must have seen millions of outlaws. When at last something actually happened, it was natural that Ransome should have adventures. He wasn't built for solitude, and when he seen a flag wave from behind a bush, he called the boys from left and right to bunch in and corroborate. The flag kep' waving, and presently two more of our men had to join the bunch because they couldn't shout their good advice, lest the robbers hear every word. I was away to Apex Rock, Iron down in the cañon, and these blasted idiots talked.

Of course old Whiskers knew that antelope will always creep up to inspect any waving rag. Before the excitement was properly begun he and his robbers slipped through our broken line.

If Ransome has time to aim he's dangerous to the neighbors, but since the odds were a thousand to

one the gun would kick him as far as next Thursday, I'd have bet my debts he wouldn't hit the party with that flag. Yet that's what happened. He got the widow O'Flynn.

With one heart-rending, devastating howl she went to grass, and she did surely shriek as if there was no hereafter. Murthered in the limb she was, and as I left to follow the sounds of them escaping robbers, I didn't have time to send a carpenter.

CHAPTER IX

THE UNTRUTHFUL PRISONER

Jesse's Narrative

WITH creditors, women, robbers, and everything dangerous, you want to be chuck full of deportment, smooth as old Honeypott, and a whole lot tactful. Anything distractful or screeching disturbs one's peace of mind, and sends one's aplomb to blazes, just when a bear trap may happen at any moment. I traveled for all I was worth to put that widow behind me, and compose my mind.

Which her wolf howls was plumb deplorable. It wasn't her limb. Indeed, she wanted excuses for a new one ever since she seen that table limb in my barn. It was her husband, Whiskers, departing, desperate to get away from her. And I don't blame him. She was an irreverent detail anyhow, diminishing gradual into the night, for if I let them robbers once get out of hearing, they couldn't be tracked till morning. The worst of it was I'd no

smell dog; my Mick being sick with a cold and hot fermentations, had his nose out of action. No, the only thing was to get clear of the widow's concert, and keep in hearing while the outlaws traveled. I was laying a trail of torn paper, mostly unpaid bills, so that the boys could find which way I'd gone.

Maybe I'd gone a mile before remorse gnawed Whiskers because he'd abandoned the widow. He paused, and as I came surging along, he lammed me over the head with a gun.

Yes, I was captured. They got my gun, too, and marched me along between them. Mr. Bull, he yapped like a coyote, full of glory's if he'd captured me himself. What with being clubbed, and not feeling good just then, I didn't seem to be much interested, although I put up a struggle wherever the ground was muddy, leaving plenty tracks down to the ferry, so that the boys would know which way I'd been dragged.

Old man Brown was away, but as I'd left the scow on the near bank, the robbers were able to cross, and put the Fraser between me and rescue. That ought to have cheered them up, since it gave them a start of several hours toward safety, but instead of skinning out of British Columbia, as I

advised them with powerful strong talk, they'd got to stop for breakfast on old Brown's beans and sow-belly, cussing most plenteous because he wasn't there to cook hot biscuits.

After breakfast they wasted an hour dressing his paw for old Whiskers, and wondering whether they'd waste one of my cartridges on me, or keep them all for my friends. On that I divulged a lot of etiquette out of my book. I told these misbegotten offspring they'd been brung up all wrong, or they'd have enough deportment to make tracks. "Now," says I, "in the land of the free and the home of the brave you been appreciated, whereas if you linger here till sunup you'll be shot."

That made poor Whiskers still more suspicious, wondering what sort of bear traps guileful Smith was projecting. "Wants to get us up on the bench," says he, "that means ware traps. We'll stay right here, boys, for daylight, when we'll be able to see ourselves, how to save them cattle."

"We'd better kill the prisoner," Bull argues, and this reminds me of his ancient friendship.

"Shut your fool head," says Whiskers. "His friends would rather us go free than see him killed

before their eyes. You've no more brains than a poached owl."

"You're dead right, Whiskers!" says I. "Hair on you!"

But he being fretful with his wound, orders his men to disable Brown's fiddle, and lash me up with catgut. Moreover, when I was trussed, this Bull seen fit to kick me on the off chance, a part which ain't referred to in polite society, especially with a boot.

"Brave man!" says I, and the rest of them robbers was so shamed they got me a gag.

"Sorry," says I, "pity I won't be able to guide you to Brown's cigars. He keeps a bottle, too."

"Where are they?" says Bull.

"Gag Brooke," said I, for Bull went by that name, "and I'll divulge the drinks."

"Gag Brooke," says Whiskers, cheering up a little, "pity he weren't born gagged."

So they gagged Mr. Brooke, and mounted him on sentry while they had Brown's bottle of whisky and cigars. I got some, too.

Of course these or'nary, no-account, range wolves reckoned my friends would wait for day before they attempted tracking. Whereas Dale got the lantern,

found my paper trail, and guessed at the ferry. Before we entered the cabin, I'd seen the glint of that lantern behind the rim of the bench, and I knew our boys trusted me to keep the robbers somehow down at the ferry-house. Ginger and the greaser lay down for an hour's sleep, Mr. Brooke, gagged and not at all pleased, kep' guard at the door, Whiskers, since the liquor made his wound worse, lurched groaning around the shack. At the first glint of dawn, he ordered Bull to take out the gag and lie down, then went to the door himself.

It's a pity that Dale, our leader, a sure fine shot, has a slight cast in his near eye, which throws his lead a little to the right. That's why, when Whiskers went to the door, Dale's bullet only whipped off his left ear. Instead of being grateful, Whiskers skipped around holding the side of his face, with remarks which for a poor man was extravagant. The shot made Bull bolt courageous behind the stove, to look for a bandage, he said, while Ginger and the greaser sat up on their tails looking sort of depressed. Not one of the four was happy on finding that they'd bottled themselves in the cabin instead of taking my advice and clearing for the States.

"Prisoner," says Whiskers, dolesome, holding his poor ear, "you can talk to your friends acrost the river?"

"Why, certainly, Captain."

"What way?"

"Signaling."

"Then tell your friends that if they don't throw all their guns into the river, you die at sunrise. Have you got religion?"

"I didn't mention," says I, sort of thoughtful, "that any of my friends can read the signals."

"Then," says he, in that suicide manner he had, "they won't get your last sad words. Get them weapons thrown in the river, or grab religion right away, for you'll need it."

"Cut the catgut, Colonel."

So Ginger cut me free.

"Show a white flag, General," said I.

So Ginger waved a paper on a stick, and Dale replied with a white scarf from his neck.

When I walked out, the boys acrost the river gave three cheers, but I was halted from behind before I'd got far sideways. "Now," says Whiskers, "signal, and pray that you won't be tempted to send erroneous messages."

"Remember," Bull shouts, "I can read Morse. No fooling."

"All right, Mr. Brooke," I called back, "then I'll use semaphore."

I heard Whiskers in tears directing his two youngsters to put Mr. Brooke's head in the meal sack, and sit hard on top. So I began to signal, explaining each word to Whiskers.

Swim. "That," says I, "means 'Dale.'"

Pool. "That's 'fool,'" says I, 'because he don't give the answer."

Below. "That's 'Hello.'"

Rapids. "That's 'Hello' again."

"You lie," says Whiskers, miserable, through his teeth. "You made six letters."

"Sorry," says I, "it got spelt wrong first time."

Float. "That's 'skunk,'" says I, "because he's a polecat not to answer me."

Guns.

"What's that?" asked Whiskers, heaps suspicious because I couldn't think of another word of four letters. "Hell!" says I.

"Quite right," sighed Whiskers, "to think of your future home."

Dale signaled, *Coming.*

"Says he's ready for the Epistle and Gospel now. Spit it out, Whiskers."

"Tell him to throw his guns in the river, or I'll shoot prisoner. And what's more, young man, you don't want to call me Whiskers."

I wagged all that, word for word, as far as "Whiskers," and when the boys were through laughing, Dale asked if the robbers were serious.

I explained to the general that Dale wouldn't wet good guns to please a lot of—

"Lot of what?"

"Terms of endearment," says I, "which I blushes for Dale's morals."

Dale signaled, *Keep your tail up.*

"Well, General," says I, "without being able to read him exact, I guess Dale ain't drawing his men off along the bank with your outfit to shoot them like rabbits the moment they quit cover."

"Tell Dale," said Whiskers in his tired voice, "he needn't trouble to take his men along the bank to whar they can swim the river. Now if you had religion—"

I could have choked with grief.

"Tell Dale," says Whiskers, and his bereaved voice kind of jarred me now, "we're just goin' to

keep a gun at your ear-hole while we march up the trail. If Dale's men fire, your wife will be a widow, Mr. Smith."

At that I wagged my arms and ignaled. *No call to get wet. Hold-ups marching to Georgia. Kill man with gun. If you miss, ware Widow Smith.* You see if Dale squinted and missed, my widow was apt to reproach. So I added, *Allow windage for squint.*

Dale answered, *You bet your life I will.*

Then I swung round facing the cabin, and saw the barrel of my own revolver just peering round the door. By its height from the ground I judged that poor young Ginger was the artist. I wished it had been Bull, for I'd taken a fancy to Ginger.

"Well, gents," says I, "your umbrellas is in the hat rack. All aboard for Robbers' Roost, and don't forget the lunch."

Talking encourages me, and it seemed even betting whether me or Ginger was booked right through to glory. Yes, I talked to gain time for Ginger, and for me a little, even persuading the robbers to take no risks. I forgot how them sort of cattle drives by contraries. I only set their minds on coming, and heard their boss give orders.

He wanted me into the cabin, but I'd taken a dis-

like to catgut, so Ginger got orders to shoot me. At that I flared up. "Shoot," says I, "you skulking cowards, scared to show your noses at the door. Hold your off ear, Whiskers. Charge, you curs!"

The chief came first, straight at me, and seemed to climb over my foot on to his nose. Mr. Bull Brooke got hurt on the nose too, and I'd just time to hand the greaser a left hander behind the ear, before I went down on top of Whiskers, and the four of us rolled in a heap. I learned when I was a sailor how to argue.

Then I struggled, dragging my pile of robbers off sideways, so that to keep me covered with the gun, poor Ginger showed his red head in the doorway. It was his life or mine, yet when the shot rang out from across the river, and I saw the lad come crashing to the ground, I felt sort of sick. Of course that shot slacked the grip of the three robbers, so I wrenched loose, struck hard, and jumped high, gaining the north wall of the cabin. When I turned round, our boys across the river were pouring hot lead after the robbers as they dived through the door of the shack. Ginger sprawled dead on the doorstep, and my gun, six paces off, lay in the dust. The robbers were disarmed, and I was free.

"Boys," I called out to them, "you done like men. You put up a good fight and it ain't no shame to surrender."

Mr. Bull Brooke's voice answered.

"Jesse, old friend!"

I heard a crash inside and guessed that Mr. Brooke had been discouraged.

"Whiskers," I called, "don't make a mess of that cabin with Mr. Brooke."

"All right, young fellow," said Whiskers, "we've only put him back in the flour sack."

He spoke quite cheerful.

"Say, Whiskers," I called, "I want to save your lives, you and the greaser. Come and throw up your hands before you're hurt."

There was no answer. Rocky Mountain outlaws may be mean and bad, but they fight like Americans, and they know how to die. I'd only one way left to force their surrender, and save their lives, so I hustled brushwood, cord-wood, coal-oil from the shed, piled up the fuel, and got a sulphur match from the bunch in my hind pocket.

"Boys," I called, "Old Brown sort of values this place. It's all the home he's got, and it ain't insured."

No answer.

The little flame lep' up and caught the brush-wood, the crackling lifted to a roar, and the robbers must surely know that their time was come, for if they showed at the door they would be shot. I grabbed my gun from the ground and ran to the doorway to stop our boys from firing. Then I shouted above the noise of the flames, "Come out and throw up your hands!"

They came, poor fellows, and I made them prisoners, marching them down to the ferry.

CHAPTER X

BREAKING THE STATUTES

Kate's Narrative

AT Hundred Mile House the long table had been removed from the dining hall, the benches set back to the log walls, and at the head of the room an enormous Union Jack draped a very small portrait of Queen Victoria. Beneath was the chair, in front of it a table set with writing materials and the Bible, while at one end the schoolma'am looked very self-conscious as clerk, in official black, with large red bows like signals of distress.

On the right sat Iron Dale, Jesse, and myself, and all our posse, very ill at ease. On the left were two gaunt American stockmen, both wearing hats, while one had the star of a United States marshal. Beside them sat the general public, consisting of Tearful George, two ranch-hands, an Indian, and the captain's bulldog. Wee James, the captain's grandson, sat with the dog at first, but presently he inter-

rupted the court to say that he would like to sit on me. He sat with considerable dignity for so small a person.

At Captain Taylor's entrance the constable ordered us all to stand. Every inch a naval officer, bluff, ruddy, cheery, choleric, frightfully impressive in a frock coat, he wore a Russian order slung by a ribbon at his throat, and a little row of miniature war medals, the ribbons, alas, too small to show me of which campaigns. At sight of the two strangers he mounted a single eye-glass, and stared with growing wrath until they removed their hats. Then, taking the chair, he permitted us to be seated and ordered his constable to "Bring the prisoners aft."

Had our captives been washed and brushed, they might not have looked so wretched or so guilty. Old O'Flynn, described by Jesse as Whiskers, with his head in a blood-stained bandage, his right hand in a gory handkerchief, looked so ill that he was given a seat. The Mexican, whose beautiful leather dress, and soft dark eyes reminded me sharply of the opera-house, seemed like a trapped wolf, only thinking of escape to the nearest woods. Bull Durham's swaggering gallantry was marred by obvious traces of the flour sack wherein he had been immersed by his

disgusted chief, and the shower of rain which followed.

"Prisoners," said the magistrate.

At that moment the United States marshal squirted tobacco juice, adroitly hitting a spittoon distant some fourteen feet.

"Constable," said the magistrate austerely, "remove that person until he has washed his mouth." Every man present had been furtively chewing tobacco, but no one who knew Captain Taylor in his official mood would have presumed to spit. Every jaw became rigid, every eye looked reproachfully at the marshal, who rose protesting in stately sentences that he represented the majesty of the people.

"Take his majesty out," said the captain with dreadful calmness, "and put him under the pump."

The representative of the stock associations rose to support his countryman.

"Clap them in irons," said the captain. "I'll have no spitting on my quarter deck."

Jesse and Dale rose to assist the constable, and for some stirring moments we were threatened with international complications. Then in his quaint slow drawl my husband obtained leave to address the magistrate. "I got an American book right here,"

said he, "in my hind pocket. It's called *Deportment for Gents.* In real high-toned society, this Honeypott claims that Amurrican gentlemen chews, but reserves the juice until they happens on a yaller dawg. Then they assists that dawg with his complexion."

The marshal stooped to pet the captain's bulldog.

"I'd help this yaller purp," said he, with a grave smile, "if I'd thicker pants."

The captain chuckled and the case went on, our visitors having "allowed that they didn't propose to chew in a court of justice."

"Prisoners," said our justice of the peace, laying his hand on the Bible, "this book contains the only law I know. I'm not here as judge or lawyer, but as one of Her Majesty's officers trusted to do the sporting thing, and to deal fairly and squarely with three innocent men who have the misfortune to be charged with crime. You've only to prove to me that you're innocent, and I have power to let you go free. But I warn you to tell the truth."

"Seems a square deal, Cap," said Whiskers.

"It is a square deal. Now, would you like to have some one of your countrymen as prisoners' friend?"

Whiskers looked reproachfully at the United

States marshal who demanded his extradition, and the representative of stock associations who offered fabulous rewards for his body "dead or alive."

"Wall," he drawled, "not exactly."

"You other prisoners. Do you accept this man as your spokesman?"

"*Si,* señor."

"That's all right," said Bull.

"Prisoner O'Flynn, you are charged with assaulting a woman, you others with aiding and abetting. Guilty or not guilty?"

"It's a fact," said Whiskers sadly, "and all three of us wishes to say what's got to be said"—he drew himself up to his full height—"by gentlemen! We tried to force a lady to give her husband away. She shamed us, and we honors Mrs. Smith for what she done. She told us to go to blazes. Yes, sir! We just owns up that we're guilty as hell, as the best way of showing our respect."

"Gentlemen," Captain Taylor spoke very gently. "I understand that you, O'Flynn, received two wounds in punishment, and that two of your comrades were killed by the men who avenged this affront. Is that true?"

"It's a fact."

"The verdict of the court is, 'not guilty.'

"But prisoner, your confession proves the right of the settlers to organize for defense of the settlement until the constable could be brought to their help. All you settlers who have taken part in the capture of these prisoners are engaged by the province as special constables from the day you undertook service, until I give you your discharge. You will be paid on such a scale as I direct.

"Rudolf Schweinfurth."

The marshal came forward and was sworn.

"You are a United States marshal?"

"Yes, your honor."

"You submit proof?"

The marshal's credentials were read.

"You claim these prisoners for extradition?"

"Yes, sir."

"Sit down. Cyrus Y. Jones." The other stockman was sworn. "You are representative of certain stock associations and submit proof? Right. You claim certain cattle alleged to be stolen, and found in possession of the prisoners? Right. You submit photographs identifying certain of these cattle and evidence of theft. And you offer twenty-five thou-

sand dollars' reward for recovery of the stock. Pay that money into court and take my receipt.

"Prisoners, you are charged in your own country with robbery-under-arms and homicide in various degrees. Now, I don't pretend to understand to what particular degree you may or may not have murdered people, but it seems to me that being killed even to a very slight extent must be damned inconvenient. I don't want to know whether you're guilty or not guilty, because it's no business of mine. I do know that this official who claims you represents the republic. I have plenty of evidence that you were found in this country under suspicious circumstances, and that you proceeded to make yourselves a general nuisance. If I committed you for vagrancy or assault, it would delay you in a business which you must have deeply at heart. I know that if I were charged with a tenth part of these crimes I'd never sleep until I proved my innocence. Do you or do you not wish to prove your innocence?"

The prisoners scratched their heads.

"Marshal," said the magistrate. "I don't know what my powers are in this matter, but it's evident that the less red tape there is the sooner these men will get the justice they rightly demand. I don't

want them. Give me a receipt and engage what men you need for escort duty. You, Mr. Representative, give me your receipt for the cattle. Now clear out, and get to the States before you're interfered with by any lop-eared officials. Constable, hand over your prisoners.

"Mr. Dale and Mr. Smith, will you trust me as magistrate to make a fair division of this reward? All right. One-quarter goes to Dale, one-quarter to Smith, and the other half to be equally divided among you. Is that fair? All right, here's the plunder. Let's get the table in and dinner served. I'm famished."

So the court rose, and the dear old captain, having, I believe, broken every statute in British Columbia jurisprudence, asked all hands and the prisoners to dinner. "Of course," he said afterward to Jesse, "I ought to have committed you and Dale to trial for homicide, fined you all round for using guns without a license, turned the lawyers loose on a fat extradition case, and impounded the cattle to eat my grass at government expense. As it is, I'll be hanged, drawn, and quartered by the politicians, damned by the press, and jailed for thrashing editors. And I missed all the fun."

After dinner the crowd broke up into little groups. In one corner the American officials were bargaining with Mr. Dale for his Sky-line men to ride with the prisoners and the cattle. By the door stood Mr. Brooke, explaining something at great length to our bored constable. At the head of the long table Captain Taylor was telling me how difficult it was to find a suitable nursery governess for Wee James. At the foot of the table I saw the Mexican whispering to his unfortunate chief—plans for escape, no doubt. Then Jesse joined them, with a present of pipes, matches, and tobacco to ease their journey.

"Mr. Smith," said poor old O'Flynn, "this yere Sebastian Diaz has been with me these twelve year. He's only a greaser—"

"*Medio Sangre,* señor!" said the half-breed proudly.

"But he's got the heart of a white man. He's like a son to me."

"I'm proud," said Jesse, "to make your acquaintance, both of you. You are men, all right."

"We fought the rich men what had wronged us, them and their breed. We put up a good fight. Yes, sir! And we wouldn't have missed a mile of

that twelve years' trail. It wasn't our way to insult women, Mr. Smith."

"You had to git that information somehow," said Jesse, "and Mrs. Smith forgives you."

The old man bowed his head.

"Muchos gracias, caballero!" said the Mexican, gently.

"That's off our minds, Mr. Smith."

"Mostly known as Jesse," said my husband.

"Jesse. We bin consulting, and we agree you're the only man here we'd care to ask favors of."

"I'm your friend all right."

"Jesse, if we don't escape, we are due to pass in our chips."

"I'm not going to help you escape."

"Wall, you haven't helped our escape to any great extent, so far as I know."

Jesse chuckled.

"But I'm asking you to look after my wife and my son."

"I'll do that."

"You'll save the boy from his father's trade?"

"I reckon."

"Put her thar."

And they shook hands.

"Them horses we was riding," said the outlaw, "is for my son."

"That's all right."

"And one thing more. This yere Brooke ain't white."

"You don't say!"

The outlaw grinned. "You sized him up all right. He joined us out of a Wild West show last fall. He's never done nothin' to earn hanging or jail, being too incompetent. But he's state's evidence enough to hang us twenty times over. He'll get off.

"Moreover, Jesse, take a dying man's word. That Brooke has an eye on your good lady. He's your enemy from times far back at Abilene. He'll live to do you dirt. Thar, I sort of hates to talk so of one of my men, and I won't say no more.

"Say, my hands being hurt, will you just reach into my off hind pocket? That's right. There's a gold watch. Take it, my time's up. Give that to your lady from us as a sort of keepsake. Good-by, partner."

"Good-by, friend."

"*Adios,*" said the Mexican. "*Vaya usted con Dios!*" And the English of that is, "May you ride with God!"

From the other end of the room Captain Taylor and I were watching that little scene. Without hearing a word we could understand so well. "Young woman," said the captain, "when I was a younger fool than I am now, I was a naval attaché at St. Petersburg. I'd seen how the Russian Bear behaved at Sebastopol and I liked to watch how he behaved in the Winter Palace. One day a Cossack officer and his son came to make an appeal. Mrs. officer had been a puss and bolted with one of the court officials, so her husband and son wanted leave to go after the man with their guns. They were so miserable that they sat at a table and took no notice of anybody or anything. After they'd been sitting a long time, a man came and laid down a case of dueling pistols on the table beside them. I couldn't hear what he said, but he sat down with them. Presently I saw him shake hands with the general.

"Now your husband put something on the table, and sat down with those wretched prisoners, and presently shook hands with one of them.

"Your husband and that Russian chap did the very same things in the very same way. Yes, you've married a gentleman by mistake."

I was puzzled. "Who was the Russian?" I asked.

"Oh, didn't I tell you? He was the emperor."

After a minute, while I watched my royal man, the captain laid his hand on mine. "Don't let these loafers see you crying," he whispered.

"I'm not crying." I looked round to prove that I was not crying, and as I did so, my glance fell upon the old man's miniature medals. One of them was the Victoria Cross.

CHAPTER XI

BILLY O'FLYNN

Kate's Narrative

BOTH Jesse and I have a habit of committing our thoughts to paper and not to speech. Things written can be destroyed, whereas things said stay terribly alive. I think if other husbands and wives I know of wrote more and talked less, their homes would not feel so dreadful, so full of horrible shadows. There are houses where I feel ill as soon as I cross the door-step, because the very air of the rooms is foul with the spite, the nagging, the strife of bitter souls. As to the houses where horrors have taken place—despair, madness, murder, suicide—these are always haunted, and sensitive people are terrified by ghosts.

My pen has rambled. I sat down to write a thing which must not be said.

Jesse is cruel to young O'Flynn. Perhaps he is justly, rightly cruel, in gibing at this young cow-

boy, taunting him until the lad is on the very edge of murder. "Got to be done," says Jesse, "I promised his father that I'd break the colt until he's fed up with robbers. So just you watch me lift the dust from his hide, and don't you git gesticulating on my trail with your fool sympathies." Billy does not suspect that the tormentor loves his victim.

My heart aches with his humiliation. His mother is my cook, not a princess, as the boy's pride would have her. His father was one of the most dangerous leaders of the Rocky Mountain outlaws, so there the lad saw glory, and I don't blame him. But all the glamour was stripped away when Jesse tricked O'Flynn and his gang into surrender, handed them over to justice, and showed poor Billy his sordid heroes for what they really were. His father has been hanged.

Remember that this ranch, ablaze with romance for me, is squalid every-day routine for Billy, whose dreams are beyond the sky-line. He imagines railways as we imagine dragons, and the Bloomsbury boarding-house from which my sister wrote on her return from India is, from his point of view, a place in the Arabian Nights. I read to him Taddy's letter, about the new boarder from Selangor, who

is down with fever, the German waiter caught reading Colonel Boyce's manuscript on protective color for howitzers, the tweeny's sailor father drowned at sea, and the excitement in that humdrum house when Lady Blacktail called. "Wish I'd had a shot," said Billy wistfully, his mind on the blacktail, our local kind of deer. Perhaps he saw forest behind the boarding-house. "In the old country," said he, "do the does call? Only the buck calls here. Your folks is easy excited, anyways."

"Lady Blacktail," said I, "is a woman."

"What was she shouting about?"

"She just called—came to take tea, you know."

"Got no job of work?"

"Oh, but her husband, Sir Tom, was a very rich man. He left her millions."

"Mother's first husband," said Billy, his mind running on widows, "had lots of wealth. He kep' a seegar stand down-town near the Battery, and had a brass band when they buried him. Mother came out West."

That night the lad had come from Hundred Mile House, with Jesse's pack-train bearing a load of stores. There was a dress length, music for my dear dumpy piano, spiced rolls of bacon, much

needed flour and groceries, and an orange kerchief for Billy. From his saddle wallets he produced my crumpled letters and the weekly paper, a Vancouver rag. Therein Jesse labors among tangles of provincial politics, I gloat over the cooking recipes of America's nice cuisine, and spare maybe just a sigh over the London letter. Billy's portion consists of blood-curdling disasters and crimes, and the widow waits ravenous for her kindling, bed stuffing, wall paper, and new pads for her wooden leg. At ten cents that paper is a bargain.

She hovered presiding while her boy had supper, I checked stores against an untruthful invoice, and Jesse prepared to read: "Bribed with a Bridge! Who Stole the Bonds," etc. Dear Jesse takes his reading seriously. His mind must be prepared with a pipe. His stately spectacles are cleaned on his neck-cloth, and so mounted that he can see to read over the edges. Next he crawls under the stove to find the bootjack, and pull off his long boots. After that he fills the lamp, lights that and a cigar of fearful pungency, and settles his great limbs in the chair of state. When all was arranged that night he looked up from his paper. "Say," he drawled, "Billy. When you ride away and turn

robber, what's the matter with politics? You see if you was Sir Billy O'Flynn, and a Right Honorable Premier, you could steal enough to buy spurs as big as car wheels. You're fiercer than our member already with that new cow-scaring scarf, so all you'd need is a machine gun slung on your belt, a man-killer like my mare Jones, and you'll be the tiger of the forest. You git yo' mother's cat to learn you how to yowl."

II

After breakfast when Jesse had gone to work, the widow came to me in deep distress, leaning against the door-post, twisting up her apron with tremulous fingers, her eyes dark with dread. When I led her to a seat, perhaps she felt my sympathy, for a flood of tears broke loose, and wild Irish mixed with her sobs. The leprechawn possessed her bhoy *avick,* night-riders haunted him, divils was in him *acushla,* and the child was fey. His step-uncle went fey to his end in the dreadful quicksands, her brother-in-law went mad in the black Indian hills, running on the spears of the haythen, rest his sowl, and now Billy! He was gone this hour. Fiercely she ordered me out to

search, for she would take the southern pasture, so surely I would find him in the pines. She feared that place; muttered of fires lighted by no mortal hands. She spoke of wandering lights; the cat had bristled sparks flying from his coat because of elfin voices, and Mick had howled all night down at the Apex. Yestreen a falling star had warned her that she was to lose her bhoy, and had I not seen that face in the windy last night?

Soothing the poor thing as best I could, I undertook the search, glad of an excuse to get away outdoors. Presently I came upon Billy perched on a root overhanging the depths of the cañon. He was cleaning Jesse's rifle, and I surprised him in a fit of angry laughter.

"Billy," I shouted, "come in off that root before you fall!"

He obeyed, with sulky patience at my whims.

"Why are you not at work? What are you doing with my husband's rifle?"

"I'm at work," he answered sulkily,—then with an odd vagueness of manner, "I'm cleaning the durned thing."

Being a woman, and cursed at that with the artistic temperament, I could not help being moved by

this lad's extraordinary beauty,—the curly red-gold hair, skin with the dusty blook of a ripe peach, the poise of easy power and lithe grace, the sense he gave me of glowing color veiling rugged strength. As an artist studies a good model, I had observed very closely the moods of Billy's temperament.

His mother was right. That vagueness of manner was abnormal, and the lad was fey.

"But why are you cleaning his rifle?"

"It kicks when it's foul," he said absently.

"You're off hunting?"

"Goin' to shoot Jesse, thet's all."

"I'm sure," I said, "he cleaned it yesterday. Look here," and I took the rifle to show him it was clean. "See." I put my little finger nail in the breech while he looked down the barrel. "Come," said I, and told him that in my sewing-machine there was a bottle of gun oil. The rifle was in my possession, safe.

Then he heard Jesse coming. "Whist! Hide the gun!" he said, and as though we were fellow conspirators, I placed it behind a tree, so that my man saw nothing to cause alarm.

Jesse came, it seemed, in search of Billy.

"Hello, Kate," he said in greeting. "Say, youngster, when you sawed off that table leg to make your mother's limb, what did you do with the caster?"

CHAPTER XII

EXPOUNDING THE SCRIPTURES

I WONDER how many persons live in Jesse's body? On the surface he is the rugged whimsical stockman, lazy, with such powers in reserve as would equip a first-class volcano. Sing to him and another Jesse emerges, an inarticulate poet, a craftless artist, an illiterate writer, passionate lover of all things beautiful in art and nature. And beneath all that is Jesse of the Sabbath, in bleak righteousness and harsh respectability, scion of many Smiths, the God-fearing head of his house, who reads and expounds the Scriptures on Sunday evenings to sullen Billy, the morose widow, and my unworthy self. Hear him expound in the vindictive mood:—

"When I survey the pasture in these here back blocks of Genesis, I know we got to make allowances. These patriarchs is only sheepmen anyhow, and sheep herders is trash. They're not what we

call white men, but Jews, which is a species of dago. When they get religion they're a sort Mormons, a low-lived breed, yet useful for throwing population quick into a lonesome country where they don't seem popular.

"Now here's Laban. He hasn't got religion, but keeps a trunk full of no-account gods, believed in by ignorant persons. Instead of attending to business, he trusts his foreman Jacob, so it serves him right if he's robbed. Yet the Lord ain't down on him quite so much as you'd think, for he's allowed to graze government land, with no taxes, mortgage, or railroads to rob the meat off his bones. Maybe the Lord's sort of sorry for the poor sheep-herding dago without no horses—the same being good for men's morals, though Jones did kick me out of the stable this very morning. Moreover, Laban lives in a scope of country where men is surely scarce, or he'd never give more'n one of his daughters to such a swine as Jacob. Laban tries to be white, so he'd get my vote at elections.

"You'd think that if the Lord could stand Jacob He must be plumb full of mercy—so there's hope for skunks. He's got so many millions of thoroughbred stud angels that even the best of men is low

grade stock to Him. And regarding us mavericks, He has an eye on them as takes kindly to their feed. Yes, He claps His brand on them as know their work.

"So He sees Jacob is a sure glutton, and more, a great stockman, projucing an improved strain of ringstraked goats and sheep. And Jacob does his duty to his country, begetting twelve sons—mean as snakes but still the best he can raise. Yes, there's excuses for Jacob, and lynching ain't yet invented.

"Jacob throws dirt in old man Laban's face, then skins out for his own reservation. On this trail he's got to cross Esau's ranch—the first man he ever swindled. Just you watch him, abject as a yaller dawg, squirming and writhing and crawling to meet the only gentleman in that country. You or me, Billy, would have kicked Jacob good and plenty, but we're only scrub cow-boys, and that's what the Bible instructs.

"The mean trash agrees to keep off Laban's grass; he puts up bribes to Esau; he plays his skin game on the folks at Succoth, which I explain because there's ladies present, and the only comfort is that the angel of the Lord has sized him up, being due to twist his tail in next Sunday's chapter. Now

let us get through praying, quick as the Lord will let us, because them calves ain't had their buttermilk."

When we knelt, the widow still sat rigid, and with her wooden leg scratched out upon the oil-cloth vague outlines of a gallows. Afterward she explained. "Yer husband, Mrs. Smith, bad cess to him, is mighty proud av his spectacles, phwat he can't see through and all, and showing off his learning and pride av a Sunday."

"But why draw gallows on the floor?"

"And why for should I not draw gallows on the flure, seeing he'll never drown? It's hung he'll be for a opprissing the fatherless and the widow, and burn he will afther for a Protestant. Yis," she flashed round on her son, "feed buttermilk to thim calves, and hould up yer head *alladh,* 'cause you inherit glory while he's frying!"

Away from the widow's hate and her son's vengeance, I led my man out under the stars. I gave him his cigar, that black explosive charged with deadly fumes, lighted him a sulphur match. It soothes his passions, and the pasture scent makes him gentle, but when I fear my grizzly bear, and hardly dare to stroke, I lead him by the keen silver spring,

across the hollow where our flowers would make a devil smile, and on through the wild rose tangle, to my cathedral pines. To-night he seemed suspicious, even there, biting off tags of the vindictive Psalms. Nor would he sit under the father tree until I sang to him.

"When Faith's low doorway leads into the church,
Light from austere saints mellows dusty gloom,
Sad music echoes in the stony heavens,
And this bleak pavement masks a charnel hell.
Yet in man's likeness God makes Pain divine
And here Truth's dawn breaks upwards towards
the Light.

Come to the hill-top: blackbird choristers
Peal their clear anthem to the kneeling gorse;
The old trees pray, their thirsty faces rapt,
While congregations of great angel clouds
Receive the holy Sacramental Light
From God's high priest, the ministering Sun!"

"What do you want?" asked Jesse, all the rancor gone.

"Jesse, do you know that it's nearly a year since we married?"

"Ten months, Kate, and fourteen days. Do you think I don't reckon?"

I sat down on the root of the little governess tree, the humblest in the grove. "In the Bible, dear, who was the son of Jesse?"

"David, of course."

"Do you remember, dear: 'for I have provided a king among his sons'?"

He looked away across the thundrous misty depths of the cañon, and the moonlight caught his profile as though it were etched in silver. "A mighty valiant man," he whispered, "prudent in matters, and a man of war."

"Jesse, I've got such a confession to make. When you settled Mr. Trevor's estate—"

"His estates were debts, and we paid 'em. There ain't no need to fuss."

"You paid the debts. You were hard driven to meet the interest on your mortgage."

"That's paid off now. Besides we've a clear title to our land, mother's gravestone's off my chest, we don't owe a cent in the world, and there's nary a worry left, except I'm sort of sorry for them poor robbers. Why fuss?"

"You earned six thousand dollars, at goodness knows what peril. I let you still imagine that you were poor."

"We got plenty wealth, Kate, wealth enough for —for David."

"I wanted you, Jesse, just you, I wanted poverty because you were poor. I have been content, and now you've won the capital to free the ranch, to buy a thoroughbred stallion, to stock the place."

"That's so."

"Jesse, under my dear father's will, I have seven thousand five hundred dollars a year."

"A *what!*"

"I'm a rich woman, dear. I've been saving my income, and there's ten thousand dollars for you at the bank."

So I gave him my check, which he receipted promptly with a kiss. He is so rough, too.

Then we discussed improvements. A bunch of East Oregon horses, three cow-boys to handle our stock, a man to run the Sky-line contract, an irrigated corn field, and winter feed, two Chinese servants, so many 'must haves' that we waxed quite despondent over ways and means. Jesse must go to Vancouver on business, and thus after much preamble I came at last to the point.

"Take Billy with you."

"But if I go, he's got to look after the ranch."

Men are so stupid. When I sing to my dear bull pines, they breathe a swaying thin echo like some distant chorus; yet at the sight of Jesse, become impassive as red Indian chiefs. How could I tell such a man of peril? The widow understands, and no sacrifice is too great for a mother.

"You preach at Billy," I said, "you pray at him. Remember he's wild as these woods, son of a dangerous felon. His mother goads him on, and there's danger, Jesse."

I knew while I spoke the folly of appealing to any sense of fear. He chuckled softly.

"Why, Billy daresn't say good morning to my pinto colt. He was bucking plentiful to-day, and me spitting blood before I got him conquered. Now just you leave me to tame colts and cow-boys. I propose to rub old man Jacob into Billy by way of liniment until he supples, yes, and works. Dreams earn no grub."

"Take him away, Jesse, dear."

"He bin making love to you, Kate?"

My heart stood still, and to my jealous husband silence means consent. Two bats came darkly by, with a business manner, having perhaps an appointment with some field mouse. Then the hypocrite

in me sighed, and Jesse flinging away his cigar stub, said with an oath that Billy should be on his way to Vancouver by daybreak.

Yes, Jesse is hard to manage, but presently he remembered about the check, which made him for the first time in his life feel rich. He's too rough when I let him love me. Indeed I had to do up my hair in the dark, though the fireflies offered the dearest little lamps. Besides a little jealousy is good for Jesse. I should not like to see his love go hungry.

III

Last night Jesse came home from Vancouver, and it being Sunday evening, he read and expounded the Scriptures to the amazement of the three new ranch-hands. The Chinamen, being heathens, were let off.

"Not being wise in the ways of high society, I ain't free to comment on Mrs. Potiphar, who kep' a steward instead of doing her job as housekeeper, or on this General Sir Something Potiphar, C.O.D., C.P.R., H.B.C., P.D.Q., commanding the Haw-Haw Guards, who seems to neglect his missus. As a plain stockman I pursues after Joseph."

By this time three godless cow-punchers, crimson with suppressed emotions, were digging one another fiercely in the ribs.

"This here Joseph is a sheep-herding swine from the desert, smooth because he's been brung up among range animals, but mean because he's raised for a pet by Jacob, the champion stinker of the wild west."

At that Pete exploded, and had to retire in convulsions, while the other two infants reproached him for interruption.

"Smooth and mean is Joseph, a cream-laid young person like Pete, who's going to have black draft to heal his cough before morning. Joseph is all deportment and sad eyes, with a crossed-in-love droop. His brothers is mean so far as they knows how without reading newspapers, but even they can't stand Joseph. General and Mrs. Potiphar don't seem to like his perfume. When he's in jail he's steward, so that the other prisoners has dreams of grub but nary a meal till he goes.

"I dunno, but if I was a self-made man, I'd hate to have my autobiography wrote by my poor relations, or the backers I'd cheated and left on my trail to Fifth Avenue. Them brethren, the Potiphar

outfit, and the jailbirds, is plumb full of grief that they ever seen this Joseph, and you'll notice that when he dies, the Egyptians don't subscribe for a monument. He's a city man, a financier, and the Lord is with him, watching his natural history, this being the first warning of the plagues of Egypt.

"Thar's only one man as can afford to know the Honorable Joseph. Pharoah has an ax, so any gent caught with more'n four aces, is apt to fade away out of Egypt. Yes, he can afford to know Joseph, and they're birds of a feather all right.

"Now horses is so scarce that up to now there ain't one in the Bible, until Pharaoh loans Joseph his second-best chariot, and gives him a sure fine sleigh-robe to go buggy riding.

"And Jews is scarce. This Pharaoh is the first king to get a Jew financier to do his graft.

"It ain't the king who pays for that corner in wheat, and you can bet your socks it's not Joseph. It's the bleeding, sweating, hungry Egyptians who pays the wheat trust which makes Pharaoh and Joseph multimillionaires. So there on the high lonesome is the Jew and His Majesty, with no club of millionaires to tell them they done right, and nobody in all Egypt left to swindle.

"Old Pharaoh's in a museum now, Joseph is located at Chicago, Egypt is sand-rock desert; but God's in His Heaven, and judging by the way us human beings behave, them golden pavements ain't got crowded yet.

"Oh, Lord, Thou knowest that we who ride herd in Thy pastures, haven't got much to be selfish about on earth. We cayn't make dollars out of Thy golden sunshine, or currency bills out of Thy silver streams, but all the same, deliver us from selfishness, and lead us not into the temptations of a large account at the bank, 'cause we're only kids when we gets down to civilization, and all our ways is muddy so soon as we quit Thy grass."

The cow-boys slipped away, no longer hilarious, perhaps even a little awed, for Jesse's quaint observances are spray from a sea, sparkling on the surface, but in its depths profound. And we two women waited, the widow longing for news about her son, while I was concerned for my man. Hard, bitter, sinister the sermon, humble and reverent the appeal for help, and now when the men had left us, Jesse remained in prayer. Almost with tears he pleaded for widows and fatherless children, until my servant's austere face became quite gentle, and

she was able to hobble off to her bed feeling that all was well.

The night being cold, Jesse had his cigar beside the stove, while I sat on the low stool so that the fumes might rise above my unworthy head.

"The widow believes," I said, "that her boy will get rich in the city."

"I got Billy a job."

Jesse's face looked very grave.

"At a grocery," he added.

I sighed for the romantic lad, condemned to an apron behind the counter.

"And the young hawk flew off."

"I'm glad!"

"Ye see it's this way, Kate. He's shying heaps at Ashcroft, the first town he ever seen, where there's a bit of sidewalk, electric lights, and waitresses. I had to kiss the fluffy one to show him they don't bite.

"Then thar's the railroad. By that time he's getting worldly, all 'you-can't-fool-me,' and 'not-half-so-slick-as-our-ranch' until we comes to his first tunnel, and he jumps right out of his skin. After that he wants everybody to know he's a cowboy wild and lone, despising the tenderfoot passen-

gers right through the two hundred and fifty miles to Vancouver. At the depot he points one ear at the liners in port, and the other ear at them sky-scraping, six-story business blocks up street. He feels he'd ought to play wolf, shoot up saloons, and paint the town, but he's getting scary as cats because there's too many people all at once. He loses count, thinks there's three horns goes to one steer, and wants to hold my hand. That's when a motor-car snorts in his ear; a street-car comes at him ears back, teeth bare, and tail a-waving; and a lady axes him what time the twelve o'clock train leaves. Then he hears a band play, and it's too much—he just stampedes for the woods. When I rounds him up next afternoon, he's just ate a candy store, he's gorged to the eyes, and trying to make room for ice-cream. The next two days Billy's close-herded, and fed high to give his mind a rest. He seen the sea, pawed the wet of it, snuffed the big smell—yes, and the boy near crying. Town men who can't smell, or see, or hear, or feel with their hands, would have some trouble understanding what the sea means to a sort of child like that.

"He's willing to start work as a millionaire, but don't feel no holy vocation for groceries. So in the

end he runs away, out of that frying-pan into the —wall, the rest ain't clearly known, although the police has a clue. It seems my wolf cub leads some innocent yearling astray down by the harbor, said victim being the crimp from a sailors' boarding-house. To prove he's fierce, Billy has a skinful of mixed drinks, and this stranger is kind enough to take him to see a beautiful English bark which is turning loose for Cape Horn. Seems the ship takes a notion to Billy, and the captain politely axes him to work. He's been shanghaied."

"This will kill his mother."

"Not if she thinks her son's another Joseph getting rich."

"Oh, it's too awful!"

"Wall, maybe I'm a fool, Kate, but seems to me that this young person had to be weaned from running after a woman, before he'd any chance to be a man."

CHAPTER XIII

NATIVITY

Kate's Narrative

JESSE allowed that the upper forest does look "sort of wolfy." He would post relays of ponies along the outward trail, so that he and McGee could ride the eighty miles back in a single march. If the doctor survived that, he would be here in forty-eight hours, perhaps in time.

I made Jesse take his revolver, yes, loaded it myself, and he promised a signal shot from the rim-rock to give me the earliest news of his return. He put out the light, he kissed me good-by, and was gone.

From the inner edge of the bed I could see through the window, and watched Orion rising behind the cliffs. The night turned pale, then for a long time the great gaunt precipice was revealed in tender primrose light and amber shade. I heard our riders saddle, mount, and canter away for the

day's work. The two Chinamen went off also on some domestic errand. The sunrise caught the pines upon the rim-rock into points of flame. I heard a distant shot, and fell asleep.

The widow had stumped about nearly all night, weary to the tip of her wooden leg, poor soul, so when I woke again and crept to the lean-to door, it was a relief to find that she had gone to sleep. She had left me a saucepan full of bread and milk which I warmed, and it warmed me nicely.

Mrs. O'Flynn asleep is like peace after war. Dressing in stealth, I prayed for peace in our time, then with a sweet enjoyment of fresh guilt, stole out into the sunshine.

Instead of Jesse's whistling, Mick's barking, the altercations in the new ram-pasture where our cowboys live, the snuffles of old Jones, our yard was filled with the exact opposite. Of course each sound has its opposite, its shadow, making a gap in the chorus of things heard, and when all the homely voices are replaced by gaps, one feels the desolation of the high lonesome. Yet I fled away lest the widow's vengeful stump should overtake me. I was so tired of being in bed.

The silver spring, the glade of marigolds, the brier-rose brake, are all most necessary before one ventures into the cathedral grove, for it is not well to pass direct from any worldly home into a holy place. And yet I felt that something was badly wrong, for evil persons must have come in the night and stretched the trail to double its usual length. I was very angry, and I shall tell my husband.

I reached the grove, at this cool hour so like a green lagoon where coral piers branch up to some ribbed vault. The waves of incense, the river's organ throb, the glory in the windows, gave me peace, but the choir of the winds had gone away, and for once in that sweet solitude I was lonely. My sitting is at the root of the governess tree, and Jesse's under the great father pine. If he were only there, how it would ease the pain. I needed him so badly as I sat there, trying to make him present in my thoughts. He had gone away, and the squirrel who lives in the widow tree, had taken even his match ends. Only the cigar stubs were left, which would, of course, be bad for the squirrel's children. I wasn't well enough to call but I left my nut.

Close by is the terrific verge of the inner cañon, and sitting at the very edge of death I saw into the mists.

It was so foolish, why should I be frightened of death, such a coward in bearing pain? And yet I had better confess the truth, that presently I ran away screaming, my skirt torn by brambles, my feet caught in the roots. Only when I passed the place where by anemones live, and beyond the east door of the grove came out into full sunlight, I could go no farther but fell to the ground exhausted. Yes, it was very silly, and that blind panic shamed me as I looked up at the crescent of silvery birch trees who hold court at the foot of the upper cliff.

Something small and black was coming toward me, a clergyman too, and nervous, because he twiddled his little hat.

"Are you in pain?" he asked.

"Are you a fairy?" I answered, wondering. I couldn't think of anything else at the moment, for our lost ranch is so far from everywhere.

"No, madam," he said quite gravely. "I'm only a curate. May I sit down?"

My heart went out to him, for he was so little, so old, English like me, but with the manner of the

great world. When he sat down he took care not to hurt one of my flowers.

"I fear I'm trespassing," he said, "in your royal gardens. May I introduce myself? My name is Nisted—Jared Nisted, once an army chaplain, now a tourist."

Was he real, or had I imagined him? "My name is Kate," I answered. "My husband would be ever so pleased to make you welcome. But he's away."

"And are you lonely?"

"Not now." Somehow the pain and fear were gone as though they dared not stay in the serene presence of this dear old saint. "Are you sure," I ventured, "that you're not a—"

"Fairy? Believe me, dear lady, I'm a very commonplace little person.

"A humble admirer of yours, one Tearful George, has been kind enough to bring me here in his buckboard, which has complaining wheels, a creaky body, and such a wheezy horse. He, Tearful George I mean, contracted for seventy-five dollars to bring me to paradise and back; but as we creaked our passage through that weird black forest, I feared my guide had taken the pathway which leads to the other place. I confess, the upper forest

frightened me, and now, having come to paradise, I don't want to go back." He sighed. "George," he added, "is making camp up yonder. Mrs. Smith, will you laugh at me very much if I tell you a fairy tale? It's quite a nice one."

"Oh, do!" I begged.

"Well," he began, "you know where the three birch trees are all using a single pool as their mirror?"

Of course these were the Three Graces. Mrs. O'Flynn and I had known for months past that the spot was haunted.

"Each of them," said my visitor, "seems to think the others quite superfluous."

That was true. I asked him if any one was there.

"A lady, yes."

"That's the minx," I whispered. "She's a fairy. But don't tell my husband. You know he laughs at me for being so superstitious."

"Indeed. Fact is, Mrs. Smith, she was bathing, and George insisted, most stupidly I think, on watering his horse at that pool. I mounted guard, with my back turned, of course, and tried to persuade the good man to water his horse elsewhere. He couldn't see any sanguinary lady in the rosy

pool, and you know the poor fellow has but a very meager choice of words. He reviled me, and my progenitors, and if you'll believe me, my dear mother was not at all the sort of person George described. He made me feel so plain, too, with his candor about my personal appearance. And all that time, while George made my flesh creep with his comments, the lady in the pool was splashing me. I'm still quite damp."

"Did the horse see?"

"Do horses wink, Mrs. Smith? Do they smile? Can they blush? The Graces shook their robes above our heads, the squirrels gossiped, the rippled pool caught glints from the rising sun, and a flight of humming-birds came whirring, as though they had been thrown in George's face. Them sanguinary birds, he said, was always getting in the ruddy way. As to the old horse, he kicked up his heels and pranced off sidewise down the glen, and the man followed, rumbling benedictions."

I explained that my dear husband can not see the minx, that my servant dare not look.

"I doubt," said Father Jared, with regret, "that very few fairies nowadays are superstitious enough to believe in us poor mortals."

For that I could have kissed him.

"They used," the dear old man went on, "to believe in our forefathers, but there is a very general decline of faith. It is not for us to blame them. What fairy, for example, could be expected to believe in Tearful George? He chews tobacco."

"Oh, tell me more about her. Did she speak to you? She's fearfully dangerous. We had a ranch-hand here who went quite fey, possessed, I think. I'm frightened of her now."

"She thinks," he retorted, "that you're a wicked woman."

"Me?"

"Yes, you. She said you would run away, and you did. I am to tell you that's very unwise."

"Please tell the minx to mind her own business."

"What is her business?" he asked mildly.

"Being a fairy, I suppose. I'll never forgive her for what she did to Billy. Besides," I added, "she makes fun of us."

"No wonder, for we humans are so stupid."

"She's full of mischief."

"Of course." The old man's eyes twinkled and blinked as though—I can't set words to fit that puzzled memory. He had told me twice that he was not

a fairy. "I am to tell you from my lady, that she is not the minx. Winds, waves, and living things," he said, "are full of mischief and laughter. The sun has room to sparkle even in a tear, and Heaven touches our lips with every smile, for joy is holy. Spirits, angels, fairies, are only thoughts which have caught the light celestial, mirror-thoughts which shine in Heaven's glory. Children, and happy people see that light, which never shines on any clouded soul."

"My soul is clouded. Help me."

"I wonder," he smiled with his old kind eyes. "Have you a sense of humor? Ah,—there. Then you need never worry, or run away. As sunshine and rain are to the dear earth, so are laughter and tears to every living soul. Humor, dear, is the weather in which the spirit lives."

"But sorrow and tears?"

"Why, how can the sun make rainbows without rain?"

"You'll praise pain next!"

"That is a sacrament," he answered gravely, "the outward sign of inward grace. For how else can God reach through selfishness down to the soul in need?"

My pain had come back, but it was welcome now.

On the left were the solemn pines, and at their feet white flowers; on the right were my fair birch trees; and the glade between lay in warm sunshine.

"Lift up your hearts," whispered the priest, and I saw my trees, which in winter storm and summer sun alike show their brave faces to the changing sky.

"We lift them up unto the Lord," they seemed to answer.

"It is very meet, right, and our bounden duty," he responded, then looked as it seemed into my very soul.

I saw the dear priest's face through tears, but when I brushed them away the mist remained. He seemed remote, awful, and beautiful.

"There is a place," he said, "where souls awaiting incarnation, rest, and from that place they come, borne by messengers. A messenger was waiting in these woods, no evil spirit, my daughter, but one who came bearing a child to you. She stands august and lovely at your back, and in her arms the soul of a man-child, just on the verge of incarnation, waits at the boundary of the spirit land.

" 'The light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.'

"That light is all around you, and I must go. This very ground is holy. Fare you well."

* * * * * * *

Two days had passed since my dear Jesse left, then through the long day I waited in the house, and the blue gloom of night swept up the glowing cliff. It was then I heard the signal shot from the rim-rock, and told my baby David that his father was coming home.

CHAPTER XIV

THE LOCKED HOUSE

Jesse's Memoir

THE book of our adventures which we began together, was to go on through all our years. We were too young to think how it must some time finish at our parting, that one of us two was to be left, with only the broken end, the pity of Christ, and every word a stabbing memory.

Since I lost Kate is four years to-night, and in all that time till now, I never dared to enter the house where once she lived with me, her poor fool Jesse. To-day, I unlocked the door. The sunlight, glinting through chinks in the boarded windows, fell in long dust-streaks on rat-eaten furniture, gray cobweb, scattered ashes. There was the puppy piano, green with mold, her work-basket, half eaten, her writing-table littered with rat-gnawed paper. The pages are yellow, the ink is rusty brown, but the

past is alive in every line, the living past, the sunny warm-scented land of memory, all full of love and glory and delight, and agony which can not be taken from me.

If she were here with me in the old log cabin, she should not see me mourning, or afraid to face the past, or dreading to set an end to our book. She expected courage, and I will face it out, write the last chapter in our Book of Life, then bury it all, lest any one should see. I warm and burn my hands at the fires of memory, and if the fine sweet pain were taken from me, what should I have left but cobweb, and ashes, dust, and the smell of rats.

How wonderful it is to think that a great lady, and this ignorant callous brute shown up in the rotted manuscript, should ever have been man and wife together! When I think of what I was—illiterate, slovenly, lazy, selfish, brutal, meanly jealous, ignorantly cruel, I see how it was right that she should leave me. It has taken me bitter lonely years to realize that I was unworthy to be her servant while she tamed me. So much the greater mystery is the love which made amends for my shortcomings, made her think me better than I was, a something for which she sacrificed herself, and in

self-sacrifice became like the great angels which she saw in dreams.

Then came the letter from Polly herself, which sent me crazy, so that my lady read every word of it, without being warned.

"Opium, Jesse, an overdose of opium did the trick, and paint to make me look like a corpse, and blood from the butcher's shop poured over my face as I laid there. You was no husband for such as me with Brooke around, the man I'd kept. Shucks, did ye think I'd be such a puke as to set, with yer dead-line round me, screaming if men came near, with all Abilene grinning, and you drunk as Noah? That was no way to treat a lady. That was no cinch for me as could buy cow-boys, all I'd a mind to. Pshaw, it makes me sick at the stummick to think I married you. I only done it for a joke.

"But you jest mark my words on the dead thieving, no foreign woman from London, England, shall have you while you're mine. I heerd of this Mrs. Trevor daring to call you her husband. She's not your wife, she's not Mrs. Jesse Smith, she's not a married woman, but a poor *thing,* and her child, *what's he?* I've had my revenge on her, and you, and I'm coming to rub it in. I'm at Ashcroft, I am, coming on the same coach as this letter, coming to

live in your home. If I don't love you, no other woman shall. It's Fancy Brooke, the man you calls Bull Durham, what give you dead away, he, and the news he got by mail, since you let him get off alive, you *fool.* That ought to splash yer.

"And if I didn't love, d'ye reckon that I'd care?

"Your deserted true wife,

"POLLY SMITH.

"P. S.—I'll be to your ranch Monday."

* * * * * * *

Kate's Narrative

My husband was still at dinner when we heard a horseman come thundering in, the old cargador, Pete Mathson, spurring a weary horse across the yard. Jesse took the letter, and while he read, I had a strange awful impression of days, months, years passing, a whirlwind of time. My man was growing old before my eyes, and it is true that within a few hours his hair was flecked with silver. When the letter fell from his hands he walked away, making no sound at all.

I sat on my little stool and took the letter. The paper felt like something very offensive, so that I had to force myself to read, and even then without

understanding one word, I went and washed my hands and face, why I don't know, except that it was better not to make a scene. I came back to my stool.

Pete stood in the doorway very nervous about his hat, as though he tried to hide it away. I remember telling him quite gravely that I like to see a hat.

"Cap Taylor, ma'am," he was saying, "told me to get here first by the horse trail, so I rode hell-for-leather. They'll be another hour comin' by road."

"Another hour?"

"A stranger's driving. Mebbe more'n an hour."

Then Jesse came back.

* * * * * * *

Jesse's Narrative

I found my lady seated on her stool, that letter in her hands, while Pete, uneasy, clicked his spurs in the doorway. I asked if he'd take a message.

"Burning the trail," he said.

"Say, if she comes, I'll kill her."

"Not that," my lady whispered, so I knelt down by her, and she stroked my forehead.

"I didn't catch your words," said Pete.

"Promise," my lady whispered, "there must be no murder."

"Tell her, Pete," said I, "there'll be no murder. I can't let her off with that—give her fair warning."

Pete rode away slow.

"Wife," I whispered—we spoke in whispers, because it was the end of the world to us two—"you trust me?"

She kissed my forehead.

"Tell me," she said, "one thing. Polly was not dead?"

"She shammed dead. She's alive, Kate. She's coming here. Take David away. Take him to South Cave, to Father Jared's camp."

"What will you do?"

"Lock the house before it's defiled."

"And then, dear?"

"When she's gone, I'll come to the cave, too."

Kate took David, letting me kiss him, letting me kiss her, even knowing everything, let me take her into my arms. She was very white, very quiet. She even remembered to take her servant, and the two Chinamen, making some excuse to get them away. I locked the house and the old cabin. Then I made the long call to Ephrata, and went to the Apex

Rock, calling until he answered from among the dog-tooth violets. He climbed straight up the steep rocks, whimpering, because I'd scarcely called him once in fourteen months. He rubbed against me, forgetting he hefted eleven hundred pounds, and I had to scratch his neck before we started up to the house, then to the left along the wagon track just past Cathedral Grove.

The wagon was swinging round the end of the grove at a canter, and when I let out a yell for the last warning, the woman only snatched at the driver's whip to flog the team faster. Then I turned loose my bear, he rearing up nine feet or so to inspect that outfit.

The horses shied into the air, then off at a gallop straight for the edge of the cliffs. The woman was shot out as the wagon overturned, the driver caught for a moment while his wagon went to match-wood. He lay in the wreckage stunned, but the horses went blind crazy, taking that twelve hundred feet leap into the Fraser Rapids. So I had aimed, and as I'd promised my lady to do no murder, I kept my bear beside me.

The driver was awake and staggering to his feet. He would have talked, only my bear was with me,

hard to hold by the roach hair. The man needed no telling, and after he escaped from my ranch, I did not see him there in the years which followed.

The woman, standing in the wreckage of her trunks, wanted to talk. We herded her, Eph and I, to the foot of the pack-trail, which leads up by steep jags to the rim-rock of the upper cliffs, then on through the black pines to Hundred Mile. We herded her up the pack-trail, my bear and I, and pointed her on her way, alone, afoot. If she lived through that eighty miles, she would remember the way, the way which is barred.

* * * * * * *

Kate's Narrative

I was waiting for Jesse until the low sun shone into the cave. All that letter, which had been a blur of horror, cleared now before my mind, but Father Jared held me by the hands, drawing the pain away. He had given me tea, he had made me a very throne of comfort in front of his camp-fire. David slept in my lap, and now while the dear saint held my hands, and I looked through the smoke out toward the setting sun, he spoke of quaint sweet doings in his hermitage. He spoke as a worldly an-

chorite with a portable bath, of his clumsy attempts to patch a worn-out cassock, and how the squirrels tried to superintend his prayers at even-song. Then the sun caught the walls of the cave and the roof to glowing beryl and ethereal ruby, the smoke was a rose-hued thread of light, and the deep cañon at our feet filled with a shadowy sea of flooding amethyst.

"Kate, it is even-song. We see the steep way of to-morrow's journey, the pain and sorrow from here to the next hill. But presently our way shall be revealed from star to star. We pass from earthly sunshine and fretted time, into the timeless ageless glory of the heavens. We sleep in Heaven, and when we wake again we rise filled with the presence of the Eternal to put immortal power into our daily service."

The sun had set, and the first star just shone out, as Jesse came, standing at the mouth of the cave, dark against the glory. I could not see his face.

The father released me, turning to my dear man. "Jesse," he said, "won't you shake hands with me?

"You see," he said, "I made a mistake myself, thinking a priest should be celibate to win love from on high. But in its fullest strength God's love comes

through a woman to shine upon our life—and so I've missed the greatest of His gifts. Your wife has told me everything, and I'm so envious. Won't you shake hands? I've been so lonely. Won't you?"

But my man stood in the mouth of the cave, as though he were being judged.

"This filth," he said, "out of the past. Filth!"

His voice sounded as though he were dead.

"The law," he said. "I've come to find out what's the law?"

"Man's law?"

"I suppose so."

"But I don't know. I'm only a very ignorant old man; your friend, if you'll have me."

"What do you think?"

"So far as I see, Jesse, the woman can arraign you on a charge of bigamy. Moreover, if you seek divorce she can plead that there's equal guilt, from which there's no release."

"And that's the law?"

"Man's law. But, Jesse, when you and Kate were joined in holy matrimony, was it man's law which said, 'Whom God hath joined, let no man put asunder.' What has man's law to do with the awful justice of Almighty God?

"And here, my son, I am something more than a foolish old man." He rose to his feet, making the sign of the cross. "I am ordained," he said, "a barrister to plead at the bar of Heaven. Will you not have me as your adviser, Jesse?"

"Whom God hath joined," Jesse laughed horribly, "that harlot and I."

"She swore to love, honor and obey?"

"Till death us part!"

"And that was perjury?"

"A joke! A joke!"

"That was not marriage, my son, but blasphemy, the sin beyond forgiveness. The piteous lost creature has never been your wife. She tried to break her way into our poor world of life and love. It is forbidden and she was fearfully wounded. To-day she tried again, and is there, in that forest, with the falling night."

"I told her what she is, straight from the shoulder."

"Who made her so?"

Jesse lowered his head.

"Who made her the living accusation of men's sins? She is the terrible state's evidence, God's evidence, which waits to be released in the Day of

Judgment. You told her straight from the shoulder. Judge not that ye be not judged. Remember that of all the men she knew on earth, you only can plead not guilty."

"Because I married her?" asked Jesse humbly.

"Because you tried. You gave her your clean name, your pure life, your manhood, an act of knightly chivalry. Arthur, Galahad, Perceval, Launcelot, and many other gentlemen who are now at rest, will seek your friendship in the after life. You are being tried as they were tried in that fierce flame of temptation which tests the finest manhood.

"Only a cur would blame the weak. Only a coward would accuse the lost. But in your manhood remember her courage, Jesse. Forgive as you hope for pardon. Keep your life clean, from every touch of evil, but to the world stand up for the honor of the name you gave her."

"I will."

"You forgive?"

"Yes."

"You will pray for her?"

"I will pray."

"And now the hardest test has still to come. For your wife's honor and for the child, you must keep

their names stainless, clear of all reproach while you await God's judgment. They must leave you, Jesse."

"Oh, not that, sir!"

"Can they stay here in honor?"

"No."

"Can you run away?"

"Never!"

"Then you must part."

Jesse covered his face with his hands, and there against the deepening twilight I saw shadows reaching out from him, as though—slowly the shadows took form of high-shouldered wings and mighty pinions sweeping to the ground.

He looked up, and behold he was changed.

"Pray for me, sir!" he whispered.

Then the priest raised his hand, and gave him the benediction.

* * * * * * *

Jesse Closes the Book

It is years now since my lady left me. Never has an ax touched her trees, or any human creature entered her locked house. The rustle of her dress is in the leaves each fall, the pines still echo to her

voice. I hear her footsteps over the new snow, I feel her presence when I read her books. I know her thoughts are spirits haunting me, and all things wait until she comes back. Not until I lost my lady did I ever hear that faint, thin, swaying echo when her grove seemed to be humming tunes. At times when dew was falling, I have heard the pattering of millions and millions of little feet, just as she said, making the grass bend.

The papers often have pictures of my lady, the last as the Electra of Euripides. I love her most of all in the Grecian robes, for once she dreamed that she and I had been Greeks in some lost forgotten life. Perhaps this is not our only life, or our last life, and we may be mated in some place yet to come, where we shall not part.

Tears drop on the paper, and shame poor fool Jesse. The Book says that He shall wipe away all tears. If my bear had only lived, I should not have been so lonely. I wonder if—God help me, I can't write more. The book is finished.

PART III

CHAPTER I

SPITE HOUSE

Kate Reviews the Book

THE book is not finished. This book of Jesse's life and mine is not finished while she who set us asunder is allowed to live. "Vengeance is mine," saith the Lord, "I will repay." We wait.

What impulse moved my man after four years to enter that tragic house? He read our book, so piteously stained, this heap of paper scrawled with rusty ink. He added parts of a chapter, which I have finished. It is all blotted with tears, this record of his life—childhood, boyhood, youth, manhood, humor, passion—veritable growth of an immortal spirit—annals of that love which lifteth us above the earth—and then!

What did the woman gain who stole our happiness? A fairy gold, changing to ashes at the glint of day, for which she lost her soul.

Caught in the leaves there is a long pine needle.

So it was among the bull pines of Cathedral Grove that Jesse sought to bury this record. Then knowing that his life was not all his to bury, he sent me this dear treasure, so breaking the long, long silence.

How precious are even the littlest memories of love! Here is the muddy footprint of our kitten, and Jesse's "witness my hand." Here is a scrap of paper, inked and rinsed to reveal some secret writing of those poor outlaws. Pages of wrath from our visitors' book—and the long pine needle.

"Belay thar!" as Jesse said. "We're hunting happiness while sorrow's chasing us. Takes a keen muzzle and runaway legs to catch up happiness, while sorrow's teeth is reachin' for yo' tail."

So I must try to catch up happiness. I have notes here of dear Father Jared, made at the time when he was bringing me with Baby David home. I remember we sat in our deck chairs on the sunny side of the ship, watching a cloud race out in mid-Atlantic. We talked of home.

"You see, my dear"—I copy from my notes—"we have in our blessed isles an atmosphere lending glamour to all things, whether a woman's skin or a slum town. Why, British portraiture and landscape are respected, even by our own art critics, and they

are far from lenient." I replied that I wanted air, air for King David.

"Now when we come to air, that's very serious. North of the Tweed the air produces Scotchness, across St. George's Channel it makes Irishness. Then in the principality of Wales it makes most people Welsh, to say nothing of the Yarkshire vintage, or Zummerzet, or the 'umble 'omes of the East Anglians."

"But that's not what I mean. Some places are so relaxing."

"Or bracing, or just damp, eh? Do you know, my dear, that at Frognall End mushrooms are fourpence a pound."

"That has nothing to do with it."

"Are you sure?" The delicious fairy-look came to his eyes. "Of course they prefer the Russian kind of mushrooms with red tops—warmer to sit on. That's why they love Russia, and Russian hearts stay young. And besides, they like to live where people are really and truly superstitious.

"That's what's so wrong with England. Ah, these board schools! I want to dig up all the board schools and plant red mushrooms. Then, of course, the fairies will each have an endowed

mushroom, the children will be properly taught how to stay young, and we shall live happily ever afterward.

"Do you know I called on the prime minister, and, politics apart, he's not at all a bad fellow. We quite agreed, especially about drowning the Board of Education, but then the nonconformist conscience would get shocked, while as to the treasury —bigots, my dear, are getting more bigotty every day."

I was getting mixed.

"So you see, Kate, with mushrooms at fourpence a pound, it stands to reason that they're very plentiful at Frognall End, with fairies in strict proportion: one mushroom—one fairy, that is in English weather. In a dry season, of course, they *can* sit on the ground, although it wouldn't be quite the thing; whereas in wet weather they really require their mushrooms—and you know they're much too careless to clear up afterward. Yes, at Frognall End young David would get what modern children need so very badly—some wholesome uneducation."

This the father explained in all its branches.

1. Consider the lilies.
2. Take no thought for the morrow.

3. Blessed are the poor in spirit, the pure, the merciful, the peacemakers.

4. Suffer the little children to come unto me.

"You see," he added wistfully, "the churches have to preach a heap of doctrines piled twenty centuries high—with truth squashed flat beneath. The poor are very worrisome, too, and there's such a lot of heathen to convert. Why, all of our educated people belong to societies for reforming their neighbors, and yet—and yet—well, fairies have a nicer time than curates."

Frognall End, where my saint is curate-in-charge, is on the river near Windsor, and there I went to live with Baby David. It was there I learned that heartache is a cultivated plant not known along the hedge-rows, that peace may be found as long as the gorse blooms, that love grows lustiest where it has least soil. For the rest, please see the Reverend Jared Nisted's *Fairyland* which is full of most important information for all who are weary and heavy-laden. Its text is from the Logia of Christ: "Raise the stone, and thou shalt find Me; cleave the wood and I am there."

From the first my Heaven-born was interested in milk, later in a growing number of worldly things,

but it was not until last winter by the fireside that we really had serious tales all about Wonderland. It's a difficult place to reach, but when you get down the cliff, and feel your neck to make quite sure it's not broken, you come to the witch who has a wooden leg. She lives in the Dust House, where the Dust Fairies want to sleep, only she will worry them with her broom. When they are worried, they dance with the Sunbeam Fairy who comes in through the window, and never breaks the glass.

There's a fairy mare called Jones, who lost her Christian name in a fit of temper, and always searches for it with her hind legs. There's a fairy bear who is not a truly grizzly, though he does live in a grizzly bear skin even when it's ever-so-hot weather. He's a great hunter, too, and likes sportsmen so much that they keep getting fewer, and *fewer,* and FEWER. The last sportsman was a fairy Doctor called McGee, who perched all day long in a tree, like the fowls-of-the-air, practising bird-calls, while the fairy bear sat underneath taking care of his rifle.

Wonderland is full of stories, especially about Mr. Man. When Mr. Man was stolen away by robbers, and tied up with fiddle-strings in a ferry-

house, well—David flatly refused to go to bed until we'd come to the ferry across Dream River.

David's dog came of an alliance between two noble families, so his name is Whiskers Retriever-Dachshund, Esq., P. T. O. David's cat, who died expensively in a pail of cream, was Mrs. Bull Durham. Ginger was a squirrel in the garden, and the dago was a badger who lived a long way off beyond the grumpy cow. Dog, cat, squirrel and badger were all of them robbers, but David would have been quite wretched if he had caught them doing anything dishonest.

Did I mention Mr. Man? He was a hero who lived in fairyland, and didn't believe in fairies, who spoke with a slow, sweet, Texan drawl, who loved and protected all living creatures except politicians, who believed in God, in Mother England, and in Uncle Sam, and who always wrote long letters to his mother. David said his funny prayers for mother, and Whiskers, and all kind friends "and make me good like Mr. Man in Wonderland. Amen. Now, tell me some wobbers, mummie."

Although David has decided to be a tram conductor, he still takes some little interest in other walks of life. Once on the tow-path he asked an

old gentleman who was fishing, what he was fishing for, and got the nice reply: "I often wonder." And it was on this path beside the Thames, that one day last November he made a big friendship. His nurse was passing a few remarks with a young man who asked the way to my house, and baby went ahead pursuing his lawful occasions. Curious to know what it felt like to be a real fish, he was stepping into the river to see about it, when the young man interfered.

"Leggo my tail," said David wrathfully, then with sudden defiance, "I got my feet wet anyway, so there!"

"That's so," the young man agreed.

"I say," David grew confident. "Mummie says it's in the paper, so it's all right."

"What's that, sonny?"

"A little boy what went in to see about some fishes, and that man what swum and swum, and I saw'd his picture in the paper. So now 'tend you look de udder way."

"Why, I can't see nothen."

"You *can* see. The game is for me to jump in, and you swim."

"But I can't swim. I'm a sailor."

"Oh, weally? Then what's your name?"

"It's Billy O'Flynn."

"No, but that's weally my guinea-pig, the pink one—Billy O'Flynn. You're not a fairy, Billy?"

"Why, what does you know about fairies?"

"Most truthfully, you know, I don't believe in fairies, but then it pleases mummie."

So Billy sat on his heel making friends with the heaven-born, and Patsy, the nurse, came behind him, craving with cotton-gloved hands to touch the sailor's crisp, short, golden hair, and David gravely tried on the man's peaked cap.

"Yes," Billy agreed, "fairies is rot when there's real gals about, with rosy cheeks a-blushin' an' cotton gloves."

"Lawks! 'Ow you sailors does fancy yourselves," said Patsy, her shy fingers drawn by that magnetic gold of the man's hair.

"Climb on my back and ride," said young O'Flynn to David, "I'll be a fairy horse."

"The cheek of 'im!" jeered Patsy, "fairy 'orse indeed!"

Oh, surely the fairies were very busy about them, tugging at heartstrings, while Billy and Patsy fell head over ears in love, and my pet cupid had them

both for slaves. David rode Billy home, by his august command straight into my brown study, where I sat in my lazy chair.

Was it my voice telling baby to go and get dry feet? Was it my hand grasping Billy's horny paw? For I heard my roaring cañon, saw my cliffs, my embattled sculptured cliffs, and once more seemed to walk with Jesse in Cathedral Grove. I could hear my dear man, speaking across the years, "Say, youngster, when you sawed off that table leg to make your mother's limb, what did you do with the caster?"

I laughed, I cried. Oh, yes, of course I made a fool of myself. For this dear lad came out of Wonderland, this heedless ruffian who knew of my second marriage, who had such a tale to tell of "Madame Scotson." Oh, haven't you heard? Her precious Baby David is illegitimate! Couldn't I hear my neighbor, Mrs. Pollock, telling that story at the Scandal Club? Then a discreet paragraph from Magpie in *Home Truths* would be libel enough to brand a public singer. My mother would suggest ever so gently that in the interests of the family, my retirement to a warmer climate—say Italy, would be *so suitable*. And madame's illegitimate son

would be barred from decent schools. Oh, I could see it all!

With his pea-jacket thrown open, wiping his flushed face with a red handkerchief, shifting from one foot to the other in torment of uneasiness, blowing like some sea beast come up from the deeps to breathe, Billy consented not to run away from my hysterics.

Feeling ill-bred and common, I begged Billy's pardon, made him sit down, tried ever so hard to put him at his ease. Poor lad! His father condemned as a felon, his mother such a wicked old harridan, his life, to say the very least, uncouth. Yet somehow out of that rough savage face shone the eyes of a gentleman, and there was manliness in all he said, in everything he did. After that great journey for my sake, how could I let him doubt that he was welcome?

"I know I'm rough," he said humbly, "but you seem to understand. You know I'm straight. You won't mind straight talk unless you're changed, and you're not changed—at least not that way, mum."

Changed! Ah, how changed! The looking-glass had bitter things to tell me, and crying makes me such a frump. I never felt so plain. And the

eyes of a young man are often brutally frank to women.

"Don't mind about me, Billy. Say what you've come to tell me."

"Been gettin' it ready to say ever since I started for England. Look here, mum, *I* want to go back to the beginning, to when I was a kid, an' mother kep' that hash house in Abilene. D'ye mind if I speak—I mean about this here Polly?"

I set my teeth, and hoped he would be quick.

"Well, ye see, mum, she only done it for a joke, and the way Jesse treated her—"

"I can't hear this."

"You don't mind if I say that mother and me haven't no use for Jesse?"

"I know that."

"Well, mother put her up to the idea. To get shut of him, she shammed dead. I helped. I say she done right, mum. If she'd let it go at that, I'd take her side right now."

"Billy, was that a real marriage?"

"It was that. She's Jesse's wife all right."

There was something which braced me in his callous frankness. "I hoped," I said. "Go on."

"Well, mother hated Jesse somethin' chronic. Afterward when—well, she had to run for the Brit-

ish possessions, and we met up with Jesse again by accident. He give us a shack and some land, but mother an' me had our pride. How would *you* like to take charity? Mother hated him still worse, and don't you imagine I'd go back on her. She's my mother.

"Then you married Jesse. Of course, mother and me both knew that Polly was alive. Father knew too—and father was around when no one but us ever seen him. We knew that Polly was alive, and mother would have given Jesse dead away, only we stopped her. Father said it was none of our business. Father liked Jesse, I thought the world of you, so when mother wrote to Polly, we'd burn her letters."

What an escape for us!

"Then you saved mother from burning in that shack, and afterward she hated Jesse worse, because she couldn't hit him for fear of hurting you. Oh, she was mad because she'd got fond of you.

"And you took us into your ranch. Charity again, and you sailin' under Protestant colors, both of yez. The way mother prayed for Jesse was enough to scorch his bones." Billy chuckled. "I ain't religious—I drink, and mother's professin' Catholic cuts no figure with me.

"Then there's the fightin' between father's gang and Jesse's. Dad got hung, Jesse got the dollars. Rough, common, no-account, white trash, like mother an' me, hears Jesse expounding the Scriptures. We ain't got no feelings same as you."

Poor lad! Poor savage gentleman!

"You saved me from murdering Jesse, and got me away from that ranch. Since then I've followed the sea. There's worse men there than Jesse. I seen worse grub, worse treatment, worse times in general since I quit that ranch. Five years at sea—"

There was the glamour, the greatness of the sea in this lad's eyes, just as in Jesse's eyes. Sailors may be rugged, brutal, fierce—not vulgar. Men reach out into spaces where we sheltered women can not follow.

"Suppose I've grown," said Billy. "Well, mum, I got a notion to go home. Signed as A. B. in a four-masted bark *Clan Innes* out o' Glasgow, for Vancouver with general cargo. I quit her at Vancouver, made Ashcroft by C. P. R., blind baggage mostly, then hit the road afoot. I thought I'd take my departure from the Fifty-Nine."

"The old bush trail?"

"Hard goin', but then I expected, of course,

mother'd be there at the ranch, and you, mum, an' Jesse, of course, and—"

"Jones?"

Dreading his news, I fought for this one little respite before he came to all I feared. If Jesse lived, if he only lived! But at thought of the old ranch life, Billy lapsed to a sheepish grin with one quaint glint of mischief. Then with the utmost gravity he asked me if Patsy, my nursemaid, "was claimed".

"There's many a little craft dips her colors for one who wants me to stand by, but still—"

"Patsy is free."

"Faix! Can't help it, I backed my tawps'l."

"Proposed?"

"Save us! It's time to offer a tow when they're union down, and a danger to navigation. Um. I'm off my course."

"You must have found things changed when you got to the ranch."

"Didn't get there. I'd news at Hat Creek, and kep' the road main north. Mother wasn't at the ranch any more. She'd poisoned Jesse's bear. Oh, mum, I don't want to hurt."

"Go on, dear lad."

"Mother'd took up with Polly at Spite House."

"Spite House?"

"It's the Ninety-Nine Mile House. There's a sign-board right across the road:—

THE NINETY-NINE
MRS. JESSE SMITH
HOTEL, STORE, LIVERY.

"She did that to spite Jesse, and they call the place Spite House."

Just then the maid brought in the tea things, so, cowardly as usual, I played hostess, delaying all the news I dared not face. We gossiped of Captain Taylor's half-bred child, Wee James at school down East, of Tearful George married to that dreadful young person at Eighty Mile House who scratched herself at meals, so Jesse said. At the Hundred-and-Four, where Hundred Mile Hill casts its tremendous shadow on the lowlands northward, Pete Mathson and his wife were making new harness for the Star Pack-train. There a shadow fell on our attempt at gossip—why does the conversation always stop at twenty minutes past? Billy began to tell me about Spite House.

Spite House! How right Father Jared was. "Sword versus dragon," he told us, "is heroic: sword versus cockroach is heroics. Don't draw your sword on a cockroach."

This much I tried to explain to young O'Flynn, whose Irish blood has a fine sense of humor. But the smile he gave me was one of pity, turning my heart to ice. "Jesse," he said, "made that mistake. That's why I've come six thousand miles to warn you. Howly Mother, if I'd only the eddication to talk so I'd be understood!

"I'm going to try another course. See here, mum. You've heered tell of Cachalot whales. They runs say eighty tons for full whales—one hundred fifty horse-power, dunno how many knots, full of fight to the last drop of blood. That stands for Jesse.

"And them sperm whales is so contemptuous of the giant squid they uses her for food. She's small along of a sperm whale, but she's mean as eight python snakes with a devil in the middle. That'll do for Polly.

"Well, last voyage I seen one of them she-nightmares strangle a bull Cachalot, and the sight turned me sick as a dog. Now, d'ye understand what Polly's doing? I told you I hated Jesse. I told you

straight to your face why I hated him. And now, mum, I'm only sorry for poor Jesse."

It was then, I think, that I began really to be terrified. Never in the old days at the ranch had Billy been off his guard even with me. Now he let me know his very heart. I could not help but trust him, and it was no small uneasiness which had brought the lad to England.

I had fought so hard, schooling myself to think of Jesse as of the dead, with reverent tenderness. Little by little I had filled a bleak and empty widowhood with mother duties, womanly service, my holy art of song, and harmless fairies, making the best of it while age and plainness were my destiny. But now of a sudden my poor peace was shattered, and that gift of imagination which had imagined even contentment, played traitor and made havoc. Laws, conventions, mean respectabilities, seemed only cobwebs now. Love swept them all away, and nothing mattered. Jesse! Jesse!

"Them devil-squids," he was saying, "has a habit of throwing out ink to fog the water, so you won't see what they're up to until they lash out to grapple. That's where they're so like this Polly. She's a fat, hearty, good-natured body, and it's the surest fact

she's kind to men in trouble. Anybody can have a drink, a meal and a bed, no matter how broke he is; and Spite House is free hospital for the district. She'll sit up nights nursing a sick man, and, till I went an' lived there, I'd have sworn she was good as they make 'em. That's the ink.

"Then you begins to find out, and what I didn't see, mother would tell me. She'd been three years there. Besides, I seen most of what we calls sailor towns, and I'd thought I'd known the toughest there was in the way of boardin'-houses; but rough house in 'Frisco itself is holiness compared with what goes on there under the sign of Mrs. Jesse Smith. That name ain't exactly clean."

"That's enough, I think, if you don't mind. I'd rather have news about our old friends—Captain Taylor, for instance, and Iron Dale, and how is dear Doctor McGee?"

"Dear Doctor McGee, is it? Well, you see he lived within a mile of Polly. She got him drinkin', skinned him at cards, then told him he'd best shoot himself. The snow drifts through his house.

"And Iron Dale? Oh, of course, he was Jesse's friend, too. I'd forgot. She got him drunk and went through him. That money was for paying

his hands at the Sky-line—wasn't his to lose, so he skipped the country. The mines closed down and there wasn't no more packing contracts for Jesse."

I began to understand what Billy meant, and it was with sick fear I asked concerning my dear man's stanchest friend, his banker, Captain Boulton Taylor.

"You'd better know, mum." There was pain in the lad's face, reluctance in his voice. "Being the nearest magistrate, he tried to down Polly for keeping a disorderly house. But then, as old man Taylor owned, he didn't know enough law to plug a rat hole. There ain't no municipality, so Spite House is outside the law. But Polly's friends proved all the good she done to men who was hurt, or sick, or broke. Then she showed up how her store and hotel was cutting into the trade of Hundred Mile House. She brung complaints before the government, so Taylor ain't magistrate now. The stage stables got moved from Hundred Mile to Spite House. The post-office had to follow. Now he's alone with only a Chinaman. He's blind as a bat, too, and there's no two ways about it—Bolt Taylor's dying."

"Is there no justice left?"

"Dunno about that. She *uses* a lot of law."

I dared not ask about Jesse. To sit still was impossible, to play caged tiger up and down the room would only be ridiculous. Still, Billy's poisonous tobacco excused the opening of a window, so I stood with my back turned, while a November night closed on the river and the misty fields.

How could I leave my baby? How could I possibly break with Covent Garden—where my understudy, a fearsome female, ravened for the part? The cottage would never let before our river season. "Madame Scotson has been called abroad on urgent private business."

"Of course," the lad was saying, "when Polly got to be postmistress, she handled Jesse's letters, held the envelopes in the steam of a kettle until they'd open, and gummed them when she was through—if she sent them on. She found out who he dealt with and got them warned not to trust him. There's no letters now."

"She wouldn't dare!"

"No? You remember he sent you that book you wrote together at the ranch?"

"You know that!"

"I read it at Spite House. She had a heap of

fun in the bar-room with Jesse's letter. Her cat eyes flamed like mad."

"There was no letter."

"She made a paper house of it, and set it alight to show how Jesse burned her home in Abilene. She was drunk, too, that night. But that's nothin'. Glad you didn't hear them yarns she put about the country. Jesse wasn't never what I'd call popular, but he ain't even spoken to now by any white man. His riders quit, his Chinamen cleared out. Then she bought Brown's ferry, had the cable took away, the scow sent adrift, and Surly Brown packed off. She'd heard that Jesse lived by his rifle, so she's cut him off from his hunting grounds. There's nothing left to hunt east of the Fraser."

"He's starving?"

"Shouldn't wonder."

"Billy!"

"Yes'm."

"How soon can I get a ship?"

"None before Saturday."

"Go on. Tell me the worst."

"The signs may read coarse weather or typhoon. I dunno which yet. She's been locatin' settlers along them old clearings in the black pine and, judging by samples I'd seen, she swept the jails."

"Why more than one?" I asked, "why all that expense when one would do?"

"Who'd blackmail Polly afterward? She's no fool. She says straight out in public she'd shoot the man who killed him. But them thugs is planted in hungry land, they see his pastures the best in the district, and you know as well as I do he's a danger to all robbers. Why, even when sportsmen and tourists comes along his old gun gets excited. He hates the sight of strangers, anyway.

"Now, all these years she's goading him to loose out and break the law. That's why she's got the constable protecting her at Spite House. Once she can get him breaking the law she has all them thugs —so many dollars a head—as witnesses. It ain't murder she wants. She says that when she went to his ranch that time Jesse sent her a message by old Mathson, 'I won't let her off with death.'

"She won't let him off with death. Twice she has put him to shame in public. She'll never rest until she gets him hanged. There's only one thing puzzles me. I see it's his silence, the waiting, which makes Polly wake up and screech at night. But I dunno myself—has Jesse lost his nerve?"

"How do you know all this?"

"She told mother everything."

"And your mother told you. Why?"

"Because—say, mum, you remember the thing your husband called Bull Durham?"

"Brooke."

"Fancy Brooke, the thing which Polly kept like a pet lap-dog. The thing which turned state's evidence to hang my poor old dad. Brooke's come to Spite House as Polly's manager. Yes, now you know why mother's got no more use for Polly—told me I'd best come to you and give you warning. That thing is at Spite House, and mother's gone."

"I see it all now. But one last question. How did you get to England?"

"Do you remember, mum, that my poor dad just thought the world of Jesse?"

"I remember, a legacy for you,—some ponies."

"Well, Jesse found out somehow that I was at Spite House. He sent me the value of them ponies, with only a receipt for me to sign. I reckon, mum, that ruined and well-nigh starving, he rode a hundred and sixty miles through the black pines, because he's honest. That's why I spent the money comin' to you. I wants to help."

CHAPTER II

THE IMPATIENT CHAPTER

Kate's Narrative

THIS chapter is so difficult to start. It deals with a time when life had become impossible unless one could jump from here to Wednesday next, and thence to Monday fortnight. Of course the book is only meant for Jesse, for David, for me, and for those to come who may revere us as their ancestors. Thank goodness, I am not a novelist! Think of the fate of the professional writer whose hosts of "characters," the bodiless papery creatures of his brain, will rise up in judgment to accuse their petty creator, to gibber at him, to make his dreams a nightmare. What novelist would escape that condemnation? Dickens might be saved, perhaps Balzac. Tourguenieff maybe, even Kipling, but in Heaven the writers will not be overcrowded.

My characters are ready to hand, and my events are real, but how can I possibly weld the notes in

waiting, to make an harmonious, sane, restful chapter, whose very motif is worry? I give it up, for what am I that I should do this thing?

To three-fourths' pound of artistic temperament, add one cup Celtic blood; stir in a tablespoon of best Italian melody, add humor and laziness to taste; then fry in moonlight over a slow anthem, and there you are. That's me!

As a little girl I would prefer a hobgoblin I couldn't see, to a real doll stuffed with the best sawdust. If there happened to be any day-dreams about, visions or reveries, I would play hostess and be well amused; but fend me from accounts, from business men, and from all the things you catch, such as trains and influenza. Hateful practical affairs have to be faced, but I rush them to get through quick.

Have you noticed that artists who vend feelings as a grocer sells sugar, are always accused of being callous? I sent David with his nurse to stay with Father Jared, so mother called me a cold-blooded wretch. I abandoned my part at the opera to a weird ravening female who can't sing, so my manager called me an atheist. My maids had to pack and run to escape storage with the furniture at the

"Pecking and Tootham Emporiums"; my little home passed to a gentleman with mourning nails, diamonds, and a lisp; my bits and scraps of stock were sold and the proceeds banked with the Hudson's Bay Company. Then came casual farewells to baby and Father Jared, and, just as the train pulled out, the district nurse threw a bunch of violets. So I broke down and howled, wondering damply why. Even then I longed for my dear wilderness where every wind blows clean, for the glamour of an austere land braving the naked eternities, the heart of a lonely man who dared to do his duty, all, all that was real and great in life, calling me, calling me home.

The keenest pleasure which ever money gave me came when Billy and I helped in the drafting of a cable order from the Hudson's Bay Company in London to that bland magnifico who manages their branch palace at Vancouver. One always feels that if one happened to want a Paris hat, a bag of nuts, and a monkey, this Vancouver potentate would make a parcel of them without the slightest fear of their getting mixed. As to surprising the company, one might as well tickle the Alps. So here is the telegram:—

"Provide three sleighs, each with two horses; engage two reliable bush teamsters; six months' guaranteed bonus for secrecy and fidelity.

"Referring to previous requirements of Jesse Smith, load No. 1 sleigh to capacity with provisions, luxuries, ammunition, books, consigned to him via bush trail from 59 Mile House, Cariboo Road. Referring to Captain Taylor's past requirements and present sickness, load No. 2 sleigh with stores invalid comforts, consigned 100 Mile House. Each driver to present load, rig and team, with personal services, and to forward consignee's receipt.

"Hire third sleigh with team one month, furnish furs on approval, equipment, comforts suitable to bush travel and residence of a lady. Place in charge of young competent civil engineer, bringing instruments and assistant to report to Madame Scotson, arriving Ashcroft Pacific Limited 20 inst.

"Absolute secrecy required. Charge Scotson."

So far the impulse had moved me to be quick before I repented, and the journey gave time for that. Leaving the sweet majesty and serene order of the English landscape, I made the usual passage by S.S. *Charon* across the Styx to New York, where I caught a stuffy train for the transit of an untidy continent. And so, in the starry middle of a night, I was met at Ashcroft.

The civil engineer sent by the Hudson's Bay Company was Mr. Sacrifice T. Eure. He stood uncovered, and while his ears froze, spelled his name to me, explaining that there were two syllables in "Eure" with accent on the first. He seemed to convey an offer of protection, to claim my friendship, to take charge of my affairs, and with perfect modesty to let me know that he was competent. Mud-colored hair hung dank over a fine bloodless face with eyes like steel, jaws like iron, accounting, perhaps, for the magnetic charm of his smile. His English was that spoken by gentlefolk, which has the clearness of water, the sparkle of champagne. His accent? How puzzling that is in a stranger's voice! Except when we play Shakespearean drama, we all speak with an accent, American say, or British. This gentleman lacked the primitive manliness which stamps the men of the Dominions. Afterward Mr. Eure confessed himself a native of New England.

He presented his assistant, led me to the sleigh, showed Billy where to stow the luggage, tucked me into some warm furs, congratulated me on escaping the local hotels, then bidding my man and his own to jump in, took the reins and asked which way we

were going. I served as pilot along a trail of poignant memories. Once as we climbed the great steeps northward, I caught the scent of the bull pines, and would have cried but for the cold, which made it much wiser to sniff. Tears freeze.

We slept that night at Hat Creek station, where Tearful George proved a most kindly host. He told me of a loaded sleigh which had passed last week on the way to Jesse's ranch. The teamster was Iron Dale. So far I had wondered whether my name was changing letter by letter from Madame Scotson into Mrs. Grumble, but now the scent of the pines brought ease of mind, and in the great calm of the wilderness one is ashamed to fret.

Our next march brought us rather late for the midday dinner to Fifty-Nine Mile House, which marks the summit of the long climb from Ashcroft to the edge of the black pines. The light was beginning to wane when we set out into that land of silent menace, where black forests cast blue shadows over deathly snow, and the cold was that of the space between the stars. Once we had to pull up to adjust a trace, and in that instant the trees seemed suddenly to have paused from dreadful motion. A snow-covered boulder faced us as though in chal-

lenge: "You think I moved?" A deadfall log seemed to ask us: "Did I moan?" A hollow tree became rigid as though it had been swaying, a gaunt pine leaned as though stopped in the act of falling upon our sleigh. All of them, alert and full of menace, watched us. The trees were dead, the water was all frozen, the snow was but a shroud which seemed to lift and creep. What were we doing here in the land of the dead? The shadows closed upon us, a mist rose, flooding over us, and far off the cold split a tree asunder with loud report as of some minute gun.

We drove on, freezing, and right glad I was to be welcomed with all the ruddy warmth and kindly cheer of Eighty Mile House. There we had tea, and secured fresh horses for the last stage of our journey. I learned also that the driver intrusted by the Hudson's Bay Company with provisions for Hundred Mile House had gone off with the team, leaving his sleigh still loaded in Captain Taylor's yard.

The malign bush seemed cowed by sheer immensity of glittering starlight as we drove on. Only once I ventured to speak, asking Mr. Eure to look out for Ninety-Nine Mile House. Horses accus-

tomed to bait there would try to stop. I did not want to stop.

He nodded assent, and, crouched down beside him, I waited until a brave red warmth shone out across the snow from all the lighted windows of Spite House. Mr. Eure lashed his horses, and in a moment more we had passed into the night again. Presently we crossed the little shaky bridge over Hundred Mile Creek, then swung to the left into Captain Taylor's yard. I could see on the right the loom of the old barns, on the left the low house, and at the end one window dimly lighted, which told me my friend still lived. While Tom, the assistant, stabled the team, Mr. Eure and Billy got snow shovels from the barn, and hewed out a way to the deep drifted door at the near end of the building. Presently the Chinese servant let us in, and I made my way through the barroom and dining-hall to that far door on the right. How changed was the grand old Hundred since the days, only five years ago, of pompous assizes, banquets, dances, when these rooms overflowed with light, warmth, and comfort, now dark, in Arctic cold, in haunted silence! I crept into the captain's room, where, in an arm-chair beside the stove, the old man

lay. I knelt beside him, taking his dreadfully swollen hand.

"Dear wife," he muttered, whose wife must have been dead full forty years, "this hulk is going to be laid up soon, in Rotten Row. Can't all of us founder in action."

I ran away. But then there was much to be done, fires, lights, supper, beds, and the unloading of the sleigh full of hospital comforts, which would set my patient a great deal more at ease.

When I left my patient, very late that night, supposing all lucky people to be in bed, I found Mr. Eure making himself some tea. Gladly I joined him beside the kitchen stove, ever so pleased with its warmth and the tea, for I was weary, past all hope of any sleep. Besides, the poor man was just dying with curiosity as to our journey and his engagement as my engineer. So, for that one and only time I told the story of Jesse's fate, and mine. The creature would stop me at times to check the pronunciation of words, or note the English manner of placing accents, his own odd way of showing sympathy.

And then I tried to explain the scheme which needed his services as an engineer.

"Let's see," he checked my rambling statement. "Try if I've got all that correct. This Cariboo wagon road runs from Ashcroft to Quesnelle, due north, except at one point where the government wouldn't pay for a bridge across the Hundred Mile gorge.

"So at the ninety-five-mile post the road swings eastward five miles, passing Spite House to the head of the gorge, where it crosses Hundred Mile Creek, right here.

"From here the road turns west again on the north side of the gorge, and after one mile on the level, drops down the Hundred Mile Hill, which is three miles high, and a terror to navigation.

"At the bottom the road turns north again for Quesnelle, at a cabin called the One Hundred and Four where old Pete Mathson lives, a hairy little person, like a Skye terrier with a faithful heart.

"And said Mathson has blazed a cut-off, crossing the foot of the gorge, then climbing by an easy grade to the ninety-five-mile post. The said cut-off is five miles long. Made into a wagon road, it would give a better gradient for traffic, save four miles, employ local labor at a season when money is scant, and be an all-round blessing to mankind.

At the foot of the gorge we'd locate the new Hundred Mile House.

"Incidentally, Spite House would be side-tracked, left in the hungry woods four miles from nowhere."

"Tell me," I urged, "what you think."

"My dear madam, when I've made a survey you shall have dates and figures for a temporary snow road, a permanent way, and a house."

"It can be done?"

"Why, certainly."

"You approve?"

"Yes. I see dollars in this, for me."

"You think I'm foolish!"

"It will be an excellent road."

"But the result?"

"Please don't blame the engineer."

"Oh, tell me what you think, as a man."

"Well, let's pretend I'm Polly."

I laughed.

"Being Polly, and from my Polly point of view, frankly, I'm pleased. Here are hundreds of new customers, with Madame Scotson's money to spend at Spite House."

"My men will sign an agreement. The man who visits Spite House forfeits a bonus for good serv-

ice, loses all outstanding pay, and leaves my camp that day."

"Is that so? Of course the coaches change horses at Spite House."

"When I've bought out the stage company, they'll change horses at the New Hundred."

"And only stop at Spite House for the mails?"

"I shall appeal to the postmaster-general."

"On the ground that you're running a rival house? Captain Taylor, you say, did that."

"My house shall charge nothing. It shall be free, and the visitors my guests."

"Then, in my little Polly way, I'm afraid I'll have to move Spite House down to the new road."

"On to my land?"

"Your cruelty reduces me to tears. I am a martyr. I appeal to the chivalrous public to boycott that new road."

"When I've brought money into the country? Oh, you don't know this hungry neighborhood!"

"Mercy! My client's done for. I'm Madame Scotson's managing engineer. May I ask a plain question?"

"Certainly."

"Is there water-power in this gulch?"

"There's a lovely waterfall."

"I'll look around to-morrow."

And then came Mr. Eure's confession. The assistant, not himself, was a surveyor. "I'm only a paper-maker. I'm looking for cheap timber, good snow for haulage, water-power to mill the lumber into paper-pulp, and a road to market. I've been traveling some months now in search of that combination, and if your lovely waterfall will give me five thousand horse-power, I shall have to build your cut-off road for myself, also the house. Then there'll be war against these black pines, your enemies. As to Spite House, it seems hardly the kind of thing for you to deal with. Perhaps you'll leave that to me."

CHAPTER III

RESCUE

Jesse's Letter

MOTHER in Heaven:

Please thank God for me and say I'm grateful. Tell the neighbor angels how little mothers having sons on earth are badly missed and grudged by hungering mortals. Prayers sent to Heaven are answered, but not letters. I reckon no one here could ever write a letter happy enough, so light with joy that it could fly up there. And when I'd a notion to write, in these last years, I knew a heavy letter might reach the wrong address, to make more sorrow in the other place. I've passed the hours writing, times when I had paper, but the stuff I wrote would make no creature happy, except, perhaps, critics, who enjoy to scoff. What can't make happiness is worse than dirt.

In the days when I thought this Jesse person was important, I used to read the Old Testament, which is

full human with pride and arrogance of man. But since I learned that this whole world is only a dream from which we shall awake, the New Testament has been my pasturage. Maybe three moons ago, when my ammunition had run out, and my neighbor animals had learned all the little secrets of my traps and snares, there was no food for the earthly part of me, and I wondered what God was going to do about it. Of course I couldn't question about His business, but seeing that likely He intended me to leave my little worries behind, I made a good fire in the cabin, lay down in the bunk, arranged my body to be in decent order in case I left it, and took my Bible to pass away the time.

I suppose I'd dropped off to sleep, when something rough began to happen, jolting me back into the world of fuss. A man in a buckskin shirt and a bad temper, stamping the snow off his moccasins, shaking me by the arm. He was my old friend Iron Dale, a man of the world—which smashed him.

He seemed to be worried, and that, of course, was natural to a man like Iron, lusty and eager, with an appetite for money—whereas poor Polly had done her best to cure him of his dollars. She is like a dutiful scapegoat eager to carry the burdens of all

the people, but Iron doesn't understand and would carry rocks to the cliffs rather than have no load in a world of workers. Don't you remember, mother, the lesson of the Labrador, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." He takes away the things which keep us from Him.

But here was Iron jumping about the cabin, busy as a chipmunk, with just the same hurried, funny way of blaspheming. He had to make fire, cook soup, and haul things in from outdoors, while he told me news about a team, a sleigh, a load of stores for me, and his own services paid up six months ahead if I'd let him work on the ranch. He was like a little boy which plays at keeping store, where you've got to pretend to trade, with nary a smile, lest he should see and the whole game turn unreal. So I sat up for soup, which made my loose skin fit me again as I filled. I'd answer to all he did, grave as a constable, playing the game of life just as I used to.

All of us have to play, at trade, at war, at love, at kingdoms and republics. We play at empire without a grin, we play with serious faces at learning and the arts. Yet all the business of men is like a

game of children playing on the sands, as though there were no tide to sweep away our footprints.

I played with Iron at being alive, and he got so damned indulgent I could have smacked his face.

When he'd tended the horses, Iron set up a clock upon the shelf, so I might hear the ticking as time passed. He carried in armloads from the sleigh, he opened cases, he spilled out sacks. He showed me maple syrup, try-your-strength cigars, a dandy rifle with plenty ammunition, books, clothes, candy, a piano which plays itself, then garden seeds, and all sorts of things which you'd have honed for in the long ago. The place was like a barter store, piled to the beams with riches wasted on me, who hadn't a neighbor left. Why, even Iron, who used to think for no one but himself, had a kitten for me, warm in his pocket, and forgotten until a case of hardware squashed out its best Sunday scream. Who'd ever think, too, that so small a bundle of fur and claws should have a purr to fill my whole bed with joy. Surely, I loved this world I'd so nearly quit, when after supper Iron loosed a gramophone. The Hudson's Bay man had shown him a special "record" from England, the angel song in Chopin's *Marche Funèbre*. We had that first, the very song

she used to sing in this cabin, times when I reckoned it a shameful thing for any man to cry.

It was Kate's voice.

Oh, tell God, mother, that I'm very grateful. I heard her voice filling this place which used to be her home. Though my wife and I are parted for all our years—love finds a way.

A week or more had passed, and I'd my strength again. The river had frozen so that we could cross to the hunting grounds beyond, and when we came back our camp was full of meat.

I was once rich, before my wealth of memories went bad and turned to pain. I once had peace or thought so, till I found that there is none for men who keep on growing. But wealth of memories, and peace of mind, and humbleness of spirit are but emptiness, and life is a waste until it is filled with love. Iron's kindness to me, the charity which sent me Kate's voice, the love behind the gift which found me dying—these are the things which saved my soul alive. My life must be filled with love, my hours must be deeds of help for others, there must be no more self in me at all. It would be better to be damned and doing good in hell, than to squander love where it runs waste in Heaven.

The truth is scarce, being winnowed by many preachers, and my grains when I try to eat them, are mostly husks. Iron calls me a coward. But Polly only weighs ninety-eight pounds, and I two hundred, so that I couldn't have managed to feel brave fighting her. Then Iron claims it's not the little woman I ought to fight, but the big evil she did in bringing all our settlers to death or ruin. A woman's whim is light as thistle-down, but thistles choke the pasture unless you fight them, and Christ himself fought to the death against the evils which grew rank around him. I doubt I've been a cowardly sort of Christian.

Was I right to live alone? For if this world's a school, I've been a truant. Can I live for self, while all things done for self are only wasted? My place was in the world working for others.

I'd got so far in thinking my morals needed repairs, when a new thing happened, pointing out the way. O'Flynn rode over burning the trail from the Hundred. My wife is there! Although we may not meet, her love has brought her from England to be near me.

O'Flynn has seen my son, he has spoken with Father Jared, he has come with Kate from England,

and he left her nursing at Bolt Taylor's bedside. She is sending Surly Brown from Soda Creek with a cable, to build a new scow, and start the ferry again. Ransome Pollock's to manage the Trevor ranch. Iron's to reopen the Sky-line while she makes his peace with the owners—O'Flynn wants to run the packing. She is finding a doctor to take McGee's practise. Tearful George is to buy an imported stallion, and drift him with a bunch of East Oregon mares to stock my empty pastures. The dead settlement is to live again as though there had been no Polly to rob, ruin, and murder among our pioneers. And then my wife will send young Englishmen to school with me for training.

Stroke by stroke this Mr. O'Flynn comes lashing home the news into my hide, as though I were being flogged. He says he hated me always, but never despised me before as he does now. My wife and I should change clothes, only I'd be too useless for a woman. Iron says the same, and in a most unchristian way I thrashed the pair, knocking their heads together, for putting me too much in the wrong while I wanted my breakfast. They think there's something in my argument.

The news is better for being discussed, and best

of all I reckon this man Eure who is to side-track Polly, building a town at the foot of the Hundred Mile Falls. The pines on the high land, too small a trash for lumber, are good enough for pulp to feed a mill, while paper is the plate from which we eat our knowledge. I see the black bush turning into books, the lands in oats or pasture till they're warmed for wheat, and when we come to the rocks there's marble to build colleges for our sons, gold to endow them. The land too poor for any other crop, is best for raising men.

It's only because I'm happy I write nonsense feeling this night as though I were being cured of all my blindness. I have a sense that though I sit in darkness, my wife is with me, and if my eyes were opened, I should see her. Is it our weakness which gives such strength to love?

CHAPTER IV

AT HUNDRED MILE HOUSE

Kate's Narrative

MR. EURE inspected the woods and water-power, then departed for the coast, secretly to buy timber limits, avowedly to find a nurse and a doctor.

Mr. Tom Faulkner, his engineer, surveyed, then let contracts for temporary snow road, log buildings at the falls, and a telegraph line which would secure our business from being known at Polly's post-office.

Mr. Dale reopened the Sky-line mines, pending my arrangement with the owners.

Mr. Surly Brown placed a cable and built a scow in readiness to renew his ferry business.

Mr. Tearful George placed loads of forage a day's march apart across the forest, then drifted live stock into Jesse's ranch.

Father Jared sought out young gentlemen to be trained at Jesse's "School of Colonial Instruction."

Mr. William O'Flynn became bartender, despatch rider, stable man, general adviser, and commander-in-chief at the Hundred.

A bewildered Chinaman, with a yellow smile, cooked, scrubbed, chattered pidgin-English, and burned incense to Joss in the kitchen.

And I, Kate, was busy nursing and keeping house, with never a moment to spare for the specters which thronged our forest. After the snow road diverted traffic, my one visitor was Pete Mathson, who on Saturdays climbed the long hill for his rations. When my patient was well enough, he would talk with "Bolt" Taylor about old times in the gold mines, or on the high technic of pack-train harness, above the comprehension of a woman.

Until the nurse came I was with my patient always, and slept in the same close room. On her arrival—how I envied that pretty uniform—Nurse Panton proceeded to set us all to rights. She was a colorless creature, supported by routine as by a corset, and Billy informed me that she needed to be shocked thoroughly. He told her that the patient, being a sailor, wanted the nursing done shipshape and Bristol fashion. Nurse and I were to have each four hours on and four off, with two dog or half

watches, which would daily reverse the order, so giving us the middle watch by turns. Nurse was indignant at the very idea, and finding me on Billy's side, protested to the captain. "Capital!" said he, delighted at any chance of shaking up the long monotony of illness. "You'll strike the bells as we do at sea," he said, "two for each hour."

Of course the first of the nursing ten commandments is, "Pretend to agree with the patient;" but then the naval officer, if he missed his bells, would awake with horrible deep-sea oaths, and "Stop her grog," so that she got no tea except by obedience.

Whether relieved at midnight or at four A. M. I would put on my furs for a little prowl outdoors. To leave the house when it was forty degrees below zero, felt like the plunge into an icy bath, but gave the same refreshment afterward. And it was good to watch the ghostly dances of the northern lights fill the whole sky with music visible.

Once setting out on such an excursion I traversed the dining-hall, entered the dark barroom, and opened the inner door which gave upon the porch. But this time I could not push the storm door open. Something resisted, something outside thrusting at

the panels, something alive. I fell back against the bar, imagining bears, burglars, bogies, anything, while I listened, afraid to breathe.

It was then I heard a voice, a girlish voice outside in the Arctic cold, chanting in singsong recitation as though at school:

"Bruce, Bruce; Huron, Desoronto; Chatham Cayuga; Guelph—not Guelph—oh, what comes after Cayuga?" Then feeble hands battered against the door, "Teacher! Teacher!"

But when I opened the door, the girl stepped back afraid.

"You're not the teacher," she said; "oh, tell me before she comes. Sixty-six counties and the towns have all got mixed."

"Come in and let me tell you."

"I daren't! I daren't! You're not the teacher. This is not the school. You'll take me back!"

She turned, trying to run away, but her legs seemed wooden, and she slid about as though she were wearing clogs.

"I won't," she screamed, "I won't go back!" Then she fell.

"Dear child, you shan't go back."

But still she shrank from me. "Oh, leave me alone!" she pleaded.

"Mayn't I give you some tea?"

"You won't take me back to Spite House?"

"Not to that dreadful place."

"Do you keep girls, too?"

"There's only a nurse, and a poor dying man."

"And you'll hear me the counties of Ontario?"

"Why, yes, dear."

"I'll come then," but as she tried to get up, "it's cramp," she moaned.

"Dear child, you're freezing."

"I'm not cold, it's cramp."

She must have fallen through the snow which covered our water-hole, for she was literally incased in ice up to the breasts.

Finding I had not strength to carry her, I shouted for the nurse, who roused Billy, and then the Chinaman. Together we carried her indoors, gave her brandy, and laid her, dressed as she was, in Captain Taylor's bath. Then while Billy rode hard for a doctor, nurse and I filled the bath with freezing water, which for eight hours we kept renewed with ice. Drawn gently from her body, the frost formed a film of ice upon the surface, but she assured me

that she felt quite warm, without the slightest pain. To sustain her I gave liquid food at intervals, and quite clear now in her mind, even cheerfully she trusted me with her story.

She told me of a village among vineyards, overlooking Lake Ontario, just where a creek comes tumbling down from the Niagara heights. Her father, a retired minister, wasted his narrow means in trying to raise the proper grapes for sacramental wine. Mother was dead, and nine small children had to be fed and clothed, to appear with decency at church and school, so that they would not be ashamed among the neighbors. "You see," she added primly, "I'm the eldest, the only one grown up, so, of course, I couldn't be spared to stay at college." And there was little to earn in the village, much to do taking a mother's place.

Then Uncle John found an advertisement in the paper. A governess was wanted for four children somewhere in British Columbia. The wages were so generous that there would be enough to spare for helping father. It meant so much of proper food, and good warm clothing for the younger children. So references were exchanged with Mr. Brooke, who wrote most charming letters, and

Uncle John lent money for the journey. My little schoolma'am pursed her lips severely over that loan, which must be repaid by instalments. Then her eyes shone with tears, and her face quivered, all the scholastic manner quite gone, for she spoke of the sad parting with everybody she loved, then of the long nights, the lonely days of that endless journey across the continent.

Mr. Brooke met Jenny at Ashcroft, and took her by sleigh nearly a hundred miles, getting more and more familiar and horrid until, in a state of wild fear of him, she ran for safety into a drunken riot at Spite House. The waitresses were rude and cruel, Polly lay drunk on the floor. There were no children.

Afterward I learned from Mr. Eure that I was a prejudiced witness, without a shred of evidence, that no court would listen to hearsay, and that the dying girl's confession would not be allowed in court except it were made under oath before a magistrate. Poor Jenny would never have told any man what happened at Spite House; she would not have given the last sane moments of her life to vengeance; and so there was no case against either

Brooke or Polly in a crime which had earned them penal servitude.

Vengeance? I think our prayers together did more good, and when the time came for Jenny's removal to a bed of lint soaked in carbolic oil, she was prepared to face the coming pain.

"Shall I die?" she asked. I could only kiss her.

"Then," she said, "even if it isn't true, tell papa I died game."

She was Canadian, and there is valor in that blood.

Before she was moved, Doctor Saunderson, of Clinton, had taken charge, and since we lacked petroleum enough for a bath, approved what we had done. He used opiates, but the pain, after a frost-bite is thawed, is that which follows burning. On the third day came exhaustion—and release.

I was obliged to give evidence at the inquest, and my profession has taught me quietness, restraint, simplicity. The coroner might talk law, but I was dealing with men, it was my business to make them cry. There was no case against Brooke, but from that time onward visitors to Spite House were treated as lepers until they left the country.

For the rest, I would not be present either at the funeral or at the public meeting, or see the press man who came up from Ashcroft, or discuss the matter with any of my neighbors.

The theme was one distasteful to any woman with claims to decency. These things are not discussed. And even if through misfortune my relationship with Jesse became a common scandal, at least I need not share the conversation. To make a scene, to discuss my affairs with strangers, to seek public sympathy, were things impossible. Yet I heard enough. The waitresses were gone from Spite House, the constable was dismissed from his position; the business of the post-office and stage-line were transferred to Mr. Eure's stopping-place at the falls. Brooke and Polly were left alone, with no power, it seemed then, for any further mischief.

Until it actually happened, I never expected that Brooke would visit me, but perhaps from his point of view the event was piquant. His betrayal of Billy's father to the gallows, of Jesse and myself to Polly's vengeance, and of an innocent lady to ruin, and death by cold, might have made even Brooke suspect he would not be welcomed. But then Billy was away, the gentleman had a revolver, and nei-

ther the nurse, the Chinaman, nor myself were dangerous. Hearing a horse at the door, I went to the barroom, and dodged behind the bar or he would have shaken hands.

While he was actually present it did not occur to me that there might be danger. I was conscious of aromas from stale clothes and cigars, liquor, perfumes, and hair-oil; I noted the greasy pallor which comes of a life by lamplight; and while Brooke was Brooke, he had to dress his part. As a professional gambler, he wore long hair, mustache and imperial, broadcloth and black slouch hat, celluloid "linen" and sham diamonds. To these the climate added bright yellow moccasins, and a fur coat of the hairiest, the whole costume keyed up to Sunday best. Dirty and common, of course, yet let me in justice own that Brooke was handsome, frank, and magnetic as of old. Even the ravages of every vice had left him something of charm, his only asset in the place of manhood.

No, I was not frightened, but as a daughter of Eve a little curious to know what brought him, and not quite fool enough to run the risk of showing any temper.

When I asked him to state his business, with a

large gesture he claimed the visitor's drink. It is an old custom, which I broke.

"You think I'm a villain?"

I made no comment.

"I've come to thank you, ma'am. If you'd pressed that girl's case it might have been well—awkward."

I told him that had I known the law, I should have done my best to get him penal servitude for life.

"That's straight," he answered indulgently, "you always were clear grit, and that's why I want—well, ma'am," he lowered his eyes, "I'm going to confess. You don't mind?" he added.

My eyes betrayed my one desire, escape, but he stood in the doorway leading to the house.

"Your presence," I said, "is distasteful. Please, will you let me pass?"

"Not till I've set things straight."

There was no bell with which to summon help, and I should have been ashamed to make a scene.

"Go on," I said.

"I dunno how you feel, mum, about life. I've been disappointed, starting in with ideals, and they're gone. I'm as straight as the world will let me, without my going hungry."

Let me here quote one of Jesse's letters to his mother. "This Brooke and I grew our beef and matured our horns on the same strong pasture, but where a homely face kept me out of temptation, he had what you call beauty, and I'd call vanity. Instead of trying to *be,* he aimed to act. He'd play cow-boy, or robber, or gambler, things he could never *be,* because he's not a man. He could wear the clothes, the manners, the talk, and pass himself off for real. The women who petted him sank and were left in the lurch. The men who trusted him were shot and hanged. That made him lonesome, gave him the melancholy past, the romantic air, the charm—all stock in trade. Long hair costs nothing, he pays no dog tax, but life is too rich for his blood, and in the end he'll die of it like Judas. Say, mother, wasn't there a Mrs. Judas Iscariot? She must have been a busy woman to judge by the size of the Iscariot family."

"Yes," Brooke sighed, "I'm a disillusioned, disappointed man."

I had a curious sense that this actor of life was trying to be real, and in the attempt he posed.

"Not that I claim," he went on, "that Spite House is anyways holy. It's not. Of course, a sporting

and gambling joint meets a demand, a regrettable demand, a thing we both abhor and would like to be shut of. But since demand creates the supply, let's have it in high-toned style, not run by thugs. That's what I say."

His spacious benevolence seemed to confer partnership, yet to be shocked at my immoral tendencies.

"However," he sighed, "it's over. It's done with, shoved aside. There was money in it, but small money, and we pass on. Old Taylor may have told you that as far back as November we decided, Mrs. Smith and me, to run the house as a first-class resort for tourists. We bought the Star Pack-train from Taylor, and the old cargador is making our new riggings."

This was news indeed!

"Of course pack-trains as such are out of date as Noah's ark, and we've got to march with the procession. You'll see in this prospectus," he held out a paper, "well, I'll read it. Let's see—yes—'Forest Lodge, long under the able management of Mrs. Jesse Smith, with great experience in' * * * no, it's further on—'Forest Lodge is the natural center for parties viewing the wondrous wilds.' That should grip them, eh? 'Experienced guides

with pack and saddle animals from the famous Star *atajo,'* we can't call them mules, of course, 'will escort parties visiting the sceneries and hunting grounds of the Coast Range, the Cariboo, the Omenica, the Babine, and the Cassiar.' That ought to splash!"

Billy had warned me of bad characters settled on the lands toward Jesse's ranch. Were these Brooke's "experienced guides"?

"Naturally," Brooke folded his prospectus, "the sporting trade had to be closed right down before the tourist connection took a hold. Millionaire sportsmen out to spend their dollars, expect to find things just so. They want recherché meals, and unique decorations, real champagne wine, and everything 'imported' even when it's made on the spot. They don't make no hurroar over losing a few thousands at cards, but they just ain't going to stand seeing Polly laying around drunk on the bar-room floor. I tell you when they comes I ain't going to have Polly around my place. That's straight. She'll get her marching orders P. D. Q."

So Polly was next for betrayal.

"Yes." Brooke became very confidential. "What I require at Forest Lodge is a real society hostess,

a lady. Yes, that's what's the matter—a lady. Now that's what I come about. Ever since I seen you Mrs., I mean madam, I mean—"

He became quite diffident, leaving the doorway, leaning over the counter.

"Would you—" he began, "would you be prepared, ma'am, to—"

My way was clear, and I ran.

It often seemed to me that Jesse's life and mine were veiled in some strange glamour of a directed fate. Little by little, in ever so slow degrees this mist was lifting, and I began to feel that soon the air would clear, giving us back to blessed commonplace. Through no act of mine, but by Brooke's incompetence, the prosperous business of Spite House had been brought to ruin.* Polly was drinking herself to death, and presently would find herself betrayed by that same callous treachery which had wrought such havoc in my dear man's life and mine.

Billy had held these last few weeks that Polly's funds were gone, that she was penniless. He begged me to let him destroy the great sign-board across the road to Spite House. Failure to renew

*Note: Jesse says I ruined Polly, which just shows how *prejudiced* men are, even at the best.

that would indeed be conclusive proof of the woman's penury, but the meanness of such a test revolted me, for one does not strike a fallen adversary.

Were there any funds to promote black pines and mosquitoes as an attraction to millionaires? Brooke in his folly had divulged that foolish scheme, sufficient to complete the ruin of a poor wretched woman, before he abandoned her interests to seek his own. Was it true? I went straight to Captain Taylor.

For a week past my refractory patient had insisted upon living entirely upon cheese, a seemingly fatal diet, which to confess the truth had done him a world of good. Save for the loss of his sight he was quite his dear old self and glad of a gossip.

"Yes, Kate," he chuckled, "the murder's out at last. You see I'm not exactly prosperous, and my retired pay is a drop in my bucket of debts. And then our good friend Polly invested all her wealth in buying up the mortgage on this ranch."

"But why?"

"For fun. For the pleasure of turning me out. She kindly granted me permission to sleep in that old barrel which used to belong to my fox, but then

you see I really couldn't be under any obligations to the lady."

"Did you pay off the mortgage?"

"I did. So Polly strums rag-time tunes on my piano, Brooke wears my early Victorian frock coat, they serve their beans and bacon with my family plate, the gentleman sports my crest, the lady has my dear mother's diamonds which are really paste. My dear, they're county society—you really must call and leave cards."

"But the portraits!"

"They stared at me so rudely that I burnt them. Ancestors ought to remember they're dead, and they'd rather be burned, too, than be claimed as Polly's aunts."

"And the Star Pack-train?"

"A half-interest, my dear, a half-interest, that's all."

"So you're in partnership?"

"Why, no. Fact is, old Pete has been working thirty-five years, with his faithful eyes shining behind that hair—it's silver now, eh? Well, I couldn't leave him in the lurch. And there's the Hudson's Bay to consider, with forts up north depending on us for supplies. And I suppose, when I come to

think of it, I'm rather proud of the outfit. So, in my sentimental way, I made a deed by which Pete is managing owner, with a half-interest, while Polly is sleeping partner with no right to interfere."

"You've told Pete?"

"No. I suppose I've got to own up?"

"You don't want Pete to be cheated by his partners."

"You're right. Just open my desk and look inside. It's the paper on top."

I found and read the deed.

"You've read it, of course," I said.

"It was read to me by the lawyer chap. Isn't it all right?"

"Oh, yes," I managed to say, "it's all right—such funny legal jargon."

I looked at the names of the witnesses, Cultus McTavish and Low-lived Joe, the worst characters in our district. The document read to the old blind man had been no doubt destroyed. The deed actually signed made Polly sole owner of the famous pack-train. My friend had been cheated.

CHAPTER V

THE CARGADOR

Kate's Narrative

IT was sixty degrees below zero. The moonlight lay in silver on the pines, the hundred-and-four-mile cabin, deep buried among the drifts, glittered along the eaves with icicles, the smoke went up into the hush of death, and the light in the frosted window would glow till nearly dawn.

Within, Pete sat upon his shiny bench, rolling waxed end upon his shiny knee, and tautened his double stitches through the night, scarcely feeling the need of sleep. His new *aparejos,* stacked as they were finished, had gradually crowded poor Mrs. Pete into her last stronghold, the corner between the wood-box and the bunk. Fiercely she resented the filling of her only room with harness, of her bunk with scrap leather, which scratched her, she said. Wedged into her last corner, she would

patch disgraceful old socks, while Pete at his sewing crooned *One More River,* or some indecent ballad of the gold mines.

"Mother," Pete would look up from his bench. "You mind when I brung her here right to this very cabin, with Father Jared, and the Baby, David?"

"What makes you hover, Pete?"

"D'ye mind Baby David?"

"Didn't I nurse him?" said the old woman softly. "He'd red hair like his stuck-up mother, blue eyes same as Jesse, and a birthmark on his off kidney. Now, did you ask her about that birthmark?"

"I told her," said Pete, "that a suspicious female, with a face like a grebe and an inquirin' mind is wishful to inspeck Dave's kidneys."

Mother wagged her head. "I own I'd like to believe Kate Smith is back in this country, but you're such a continuous and enduring liar."

"That's so," said Pete.

One day when the sun shone brightly into the cabin, Billy arrived with a letter from Captain Taylor. Pete would not give it to mother, or read it aloud, or even tell the news. He danced an ungainly hornpipe, and mother had to shake him.

"Can a woman's tender care
Cease toward the child She—Bear?
In the Old town
To-night my ba-Bee!"

"Now what on airth's the matter with yew?" mother boiled over.

"Yes, she may forgetful Bee,
Yet will I—remember Me.

"Finish them riggings by first May, says he.

"Says the old Obadiah
To the young Obadiah,
Obadiah. Obadiah!
Oh, be damned!

"Says I'm partner and boss of the outfit, and running the whole shootin' match, and I'll get more wealth than'll patch hell a mile, and

"Thar's none like Nancy Lee, I trow,
Ow! Ow!

"Oh, mother, Bolt's give me a half-interest, and ain't this a happy little home, my darlin'!"

At that Mrs. Pete flung her skinny arms around his neck, and the two silly old things sobbed together.

A week later, when, to save Pete a long tramp, Billy rode down with the rations, he found the old people concerned "about this yere partnership."

"Mother allows this Brooke is trash," said Pete, wagging his snowy head, "and for all the interest he takes he's mostly corpse. Thar's shorely holes in my 'skito bar."

Billy read the letter thoughtfully.

"Brooke been to see the riggings?" he asked.

"Once in December. He don't know nothin', either."

"Wonder what he wants?"

"Smells mean, eh?"

"A mean smell, Pete."

Billy had spent the week tracking down the two bad characters who had served as witnesses to a false agreement. Their confession was now in evidence against Brooke, in case he dared repudiate Mathson's rights as partner, but there was no need to alarm the cargador. So Billy changed the subject, demanding tea, and there was a fine gossip.

"Mr. O'Flynn," asked mother, "hev yew bin in love?"

"Engaged," said Billy in triumph.

"Dew tell!"

"Yes, to Madame Scotson's nurse over in England."

"Does she patch your socks?"

"Now, mother," Pete interrupted, "when you was courting me did you patch my socks?"

"Wall, I—"

"Come to think," said the cargador, "I didn't have them, being then in the Confederate army. But, mother, you did sure scratch my face!"

"Wall, that's no dream," said mother, bridling.

Once after his Saturday's tramp up the great hill, Pete returned looking very old. "I axed Bolt," he explained, "about this yere partnership."

"Well?" asked mother sharply. "Well?"

"Bolt says thar's pigs with pink bows to their tails, just stretchin' and stretchin' around his sty."

The old woman turned her back, for Pete was crying.

In April there came a rush of warmth out of the west, licking up all the snow, save only on that high plateau where the Hundred and Spite House seemed to wait and wait in the white silence.

The spring storms came, the rains changed to snow, the snow changed to rain, with hail-storms, and thunder rolling over snow. The cheeky little

buttercups peeped up through the tails of the snow-drift, and far away, below Jesse's ranch in the Fraser cañon, the Star brand mules worshiped their old bell mare among the marigolds. The ground was bare now about Pete's cabin, all sodden pine chips to the edge of the rain-drenched bush, and the willow buds were bursting.

Pete sat under a roof of cedar shakes which he had built to shelter the new "riggings." Around him in a horseshoe stood fifty complete *aparejos*, each with coiled lash and sling rope underneath, breeching and crupper, *sovran helmo* and *cinchas*, sweat pad, blanket, and *corona*, while the head-ropes strapped the *mantas* over all. He was riveting the last of sixty hackamores, as he dreamed of the great north trail, of open meadows by the Hagwilgaet, of the heaven-piercing spire of Tsegeordinlth at the Forks of Skeena.

"Mother," he said, "I'm no slouch of a cargador. Them red gin cases is still to rig for kitchen boxes, and it's all complete. The mules is fattening good, I hear, and the men's the same as last summer, all worth their feed, too."

But mother, grim and fierce in the throes of her spring cleaning, had not come to admire. "Pete,"

she shrilled, "two more buckets of water, and yew jest git a move on. And how long hev yew bin promisin' to whittle me them clothes-pins? Now jest yew hustle, Pete, or I'll get right ugly."

Pete only cut from the plug into his palm, and rolled the tobacco small for his corn-cob pipe. His winter servitude was ended, and he was master, the cargador before whom all men bow in the dread northlands. Mother went off content to carry her own water, and Pete, with something of a flourish, lighted his pipe.

"Mother!" Pete let out a sharp call, and forgetting her business, mother came quite humbly, as though to heel. "Yes, Pete?"

He pointed with his pipe at a distant horseman rounding the flank of the hill.

"Brooke?" she whispered, both gnarled rheumatic hands clutched at her heart.

"I reckon," said Pete cheerfully. "Thinks he's a circus procession. That sorrel's clattering a loose near-hind shoe, and her mouth just bleeding as he saws with that spade bit. He's a sure polecat. Trots down-hill, too, and suffers in his tail. Incompetent, mother. Look at his feet! He's bad as a stale salmon, rotten to the bones. Been drinking, too."

Brooke drew up and dismounted, leaving his rein on the horse's neck, instead of dropping it to the ground. When Brooke moved to sit on an *aparejo,* Pete ordered him to one of the kitchen boxes. "Not Bolt hisself may sit on *my* riggings," said the old gray cargador.

"I thought," said Brooke quite kindly, "that this harness was mine."

"A half-interest," said mother, "sure-ly."

"I fear," said Brooke, "you sort of misunderstood. Old Taylor did say something about your usefulness as a working partner, and, of course, if we hadn't canceled that preposterous contract with the Hudson's Bay Company, there's no doubt your knowledge of the country up north would have been worth paying for. It was, as you say, damned awkward about his being blind as a bat; in fact, I was put to quite a lot of trouble getting the agreement witnessed. However," he produced a document which mother snatched, "it's all there in black and white, and there's the old fool's signature—holds good in any court of law—proves that I've bought and paid for the whole *atajo.* You needn't claim I haven't a clear title—so you needn't stare at

me as if I'd forged the signature. It's straight goods, I tell you."

Mother reeled backward, while she grabbed Pete's shoulders so that the agreement fluttered to Brooke's feet. She steadied herself, then with a husky croak, "You made Bolt sign *that*—blind, dying, so he dunno what's on the paper."

"Can you prove that?" asked Brooke indulgently, as though he spoke to children. "If you say things like that, it's criminal libel, and you're both liable to the Skookum House. However," he shrugged his shoulders, and put the agreement away, "I don't want to be hard on you, Pete."

"Mister Mathson," mother hissed at him.

Pete, with a whispered word to mother, rose from his bench, and without appearing to see Mr. Brooke, walked past him across the sunlit yard, and on slowly up the great lifting curve of the road to Hundred Mile House.

The sun was setting behind him when Pete rested at last upon the snowclad summit, and dusk lay in lakes of shadow far below him. At the Hundred he found the lamps alight, and, as usual, Billy offered him a drink. "I ain't drinking," said Pete huskily, as he lurched past the bar into the dining-

hall, and on to the little room on the right where Captain Taylor lay.

"Bolt!" he whispered.

"That you, Pete? Sit down," said the boss cheerily. "How's the claim, Pete? Getting coarse gold, eh?"

"Gold? Say, Bolt, what's the matter, old fellow?"

"Matter? Why, nothing, Pete," the blind eyes shone keenly; "of course I'm not nearly to bedrock yet, and as to what I owe you've jolly well got to wait. How's old Calamity? I got Lost Creek Jim to work at last."

Was the boss dreaming of old times on Lightning Creek?

"Watty's in with the mail," said Bolt.

Watty had been dead these thirty years.

Then Pete sat down on the bedside, and the two miners prattled about the new flume, and the price of flour in a camp now overgrown with jungle.

A word to Billy would have been enough to get the *aparejos* to a place of safety, pending the settlement of Pete's just claim as partner. But the cargador knew well that death had come to take the one man he loved. This was no time for sordid

business, disturbing Bolt Taylor's peace. It was better to go quietly.

* * * * * * *

The sky was full of stars as Pete went homeward. The stars were big and round; the forest in an ecstasy kept vigil all alert, all silent, and the little streams of the thaw were saying their prayers before the frost sleep of the later hours. The man was at peace. It is not so very much to be cargador; but it is a very big thing indeed to be unselfish. The trees kept vigil, the little streams crooned sleepy prayers, the stars in glory humbly served as lamps, and the man made no cry in his pain. Far down in the valley he saw a red flame rise.

* * * * * * *

Mother saw Brooke ride off to inspect his Star mules in their pasture far away down the Fraser Cañon. She blacked the stove with malice, she shook the bedding in enmity, set the furniture to rights as though it were being punished, then sat on the damp floor brooding, while twilight deepened over a world of treachery. Brooke was a thief, the

lying boss had used Pete and thrown him away wrung dry. And Pete was an old fool who would forgive.

She had dreaded the lonely summer when she was left with only squirrels for company. Now Pete would be "settin' " around, ruined, and out of work, the man who had been used and thrown aside, the laughing-stock of the teamsters who saw his pride brought low.

Cold and hot by turns, mother made herself tidy against Pete's return, got the supper ready, and sat watching the door-step. She smoked his spare corn-cob pipe devising vengeance, while the night closed over her head.

The frontier breeds fierce women, with narrow venomous enmities toward the foes of the house. Even if Pete suffered, Brooke should not prosper, or the boss who had failed her man. Mother dragged two five-gallon cans of petroleum from the lean-to, and staggering under their weight, poured the oil over all Brooke's harness. Breathing heavily with her labor, she carried loads of swampy hay, and cord-wood, until the *aparejos* were but part of a bonfire. Then with a brand from the stove she set

the hay alight. There should be no public shame to break Pete's heart, there should be no pack-train unless he were cargador.

Pete stood beside the ashes, searching mother's face with his slow brooding eyes. Her burning rage was gone, and she was afraid, for now she thought too late of all his loving pride in the work, the greatness of the thing which his knowledge and skill had made. *That* she had burned. Understanding how love had made this blunder, Pete said no word. He only knew that Bolt had paid him seven hundred dollars in cash and kind, which must be returned. In silence he turned away, and once more faced the terrible hill which led to the Hundred Mile House.

* * * * * * *

The spring was in my blood, and I could not sleep. Can any creature sleep when the spring's sweet restless air calls to all nature? The bears were about again after their winter sleep, busy with last year's berries. The deer were feasting on new grass down in the lowlands, the wolverines and cougar were sneaking homeward after the night's hunting. Even the little birds were coming back to the north, for now and again as I strolled along the

road I would hear a sleepy twitter. "Isn't it dawn yet?" "Not yet, have another nap." So I came to the brow of the great hill whence I should see the dawn.

Down in the lower country, on every pool the water-fowl lay abed, each, from the biggest goose to the littlest teal, with its head tucked under cover of a wing, and one quaint eye cocked up to catch the glint of dawn. A wan light was spreading in the northeastern sky, and presently the snowy brow of the hill revealed its wrinkled front, its frozen runnels. The sentinels of the wild fowl saw that first gleam of coming day, called the reveille along from pool to pool, roused thunder of innumerable wings, marshaled their echelons in soaring hosts, and broke away in the northward flight of spring. Far in the east a lone moose trumpeted.

I was turning back refreshed toward my duty, when I heard something moan. The sound came from underneath a pine tree, the one at the very top of the long climb which Pete had blazed with his inscription, "Got thar." With my heart in my mouth I went to find out what was the matter, and so discovered the old cargador crouched down against the trunk.

"Pete," I asked in a very shaky voice, "what on earth's the matter?"

"Dying, mum."

"But it's too damp here. Why, you'll catch your death of cold."

"That would never do. Say, mum, how's Bolt?"

"Oh, ever so much better."

"Can't do it," said Pete, "if I died first he'd have the joke on me."

"Wouldn't you like a hot rum?"

Pete staggered to his feet. "I'd go for that," he sighed, "just like one man."

So he took my arm, and I helped him along the road.

"She burned them riggings," he said.

"Mother?"

"Yes. Brooke came inspecting them riggings, so mother burned 'em."

"Won't that be rather awkward?"

"Some. You see, mum, Bolt paid me four hundred and five dollars cash, so I come to return him the money."

I didn't quite understand. "You see, Pete," I suggested, "you and Brooke are the owners. Don't you owe half to yourself and half to Brooke?"

"Well, if that's so, I'll pay myself and owe the rest to Brooke. But then he claims the whole Star *atajo*."

"In that case you owe the whole of the money to Brooke."

"I don't mind owing Brooke." Pete felt so much better that he was able to walk without help. "Brooke's gone on to inspect mules. I wonder how he'll get on with them mules?"

As it happened, Jesse was an actual witness to Mr. Brooke's inspection of the Star mules at their pasture below his ranch. Here is his narrative:

"Mules are the most religious of all animals. They believe in the bell mare, who creates grass, water, mud holes, and mosquitoes, and leads them in the paths of virtue where they don't get any fun. And when they worship her too much she kicks them in the stomach.

"The trouble for these poor mules was that they followed a false goddess. Their bell mare Prue ought to have been old enough to know better, but at the age of twenty-three, with gray hair and bald withers, she was still female.

"She and her mules had been grazing maybe half a mile when my new stallion, young Jehoshaphat,

happened along with his harem of twenty-five mares, smelling down wind for a drink. The mares looked so snug and grass-fat they could scarcely waddle, but Jehoshaphat was full of sinful pride, waltzing high steps at the sight of Prue.

"You should have seen Prue playing up innocent modesty in front of Jehoshaphat, pretending she wasn't there, making believe he was too sudden, didn't approve of the gentleman, flattering his vanity with all sorts of airs and graces. He up with his tail and showed off, prancing around pleased as Punch. Prue paraded herself along in front of the harem to spite the married mares, and all her mules came worshiping along in pursuit. Those mares gave the mules the biggest kicking you ever saw in your life.

"There was me lying on Face Rock like a little boy at a circus, and there was the performance proceeding so joyful that I never saw Brooke until he rode down right into the middle of the fun. Jehoshaphat got mad and went for Brooke, chasing him around the pasture. Prue chased Jehoshaphat, the mules chased Prue, the harem mares bit and kicked at everybody, Brooke galloped delirious in all direc-

tions, and I laughed until I could hardly hold down the rocks.

"Of course, if Brooke hadn't been a mere mistake on earth, he would have herded gently to the nearest corral, and cut the two outfits apart. But Brooke proceeded to lose his temper, pulled his gun, jumped his wretched sorrel behind a tree, and let drive. He missed the stallion. He shot Prue through the heart.

"There was nothing after that to keep the sixty Star mules together. Some went up the cañon, some down, a few even swam the Fraser, but the heft of them climbed the big cliffs and vanished into the forest.

"I reckon Pete and his *arrieros* could collect those mules and break them to loving a new *madrina*. But with Brooke as cargador, the great Star Packtrain's numbered with the past, and Mathson's partnership is scarce worth arguing.

"I was sorry to see the fine mules lost, and in my grief I kicked Brooke about one-third of a mile on his way home afoot."

CHAPTER VI

THE BLACK NIGHT

Kate's Narrative

"I, BOULTON Wemyss Taylor, Commander R. N., retired, being of sound mind in a dying body, do hereby make my last will and testament:

"And do appoint the lady known as Madame Scotson my sole executress and trustee of all property which I may die possessed of;

"To pay my just debts, and to administer the remainder on behalf of my grandson, James Taylor,

"Until at his coming of age he shall receive the whole estate, if there is any;

"Save only that I bequeath to Madame Scotson my sword and the Victoria Cross;

"And with regard to burial, it is my will that no money whatever shall be spent, but that my body, wrapped in the flag by right of her majesty's commission, shall be consigned to the earth by my neighbors; that no friend of mine shall be allowed

to stand uncovered catching cold, or to wear unseemly black clothing at the service of the resurrection, or to toll bells which should be pealed when the soul passes to God, or to make pretense or parade of grief for one who is glad to go."

The months of nursing were ended. No longer should Nurse Panton and I be afraid when our patient was good, or rejoice when fractious whims and difficult absurdities marked those rallies in which he fought off death. At the last, after many hours of silence, he asked me in a boyish voice if he might go up-stairs to see his uniform. In his dreams he was leaving school to enter the royal navy.

Billy was away on an errand to the Falls, and it was Nurse Panton's watch below, when at ten in the evening I saw the change come very suddenly. The face of my dear friend, no longer old, but timeless, reflected an unearthly majesty.

For the next hour I was busy rendering the last services, in haste, for the lamp had a most peculiar smell. I took it away and lighted candles, but it was not the lamp. Spreading the Union Jack upon the bed, I bolted from that room. For a time I sat in the dining-hall but could not stay there. Even in the barroom I still had to fight off something in-

tangible, a sense of being watched, a presentiment of evil coming swiftly nearer.

Closing the door which led into the house, I opened that which gave upon the yard, then placed a flickering candle on the counter, and my chair in front of it facing the darkness. All through the evening the drenching rain had fallen, with sob of dripping eaves. Now at the open doorway, loud, insistent, the great diapason of the rain was choral to those little sad voices which fluted, throbbed, and muttered near at hand, the lament of the water drops, the liquid note from every pool, the plaint of trickling streamlets.

It is the presence of the dead which makes their resting-places serene with quiet beauty, instinct with tenderness toward all living hearts. That presence had entered the good log house, a home of human warmth, of kindly comfort, made holy, consecrate, where people would hush their voices, constrained to reverence.

And in the gracious monotone of the rain, compound of voices joined in requiem, I felt a soothing melancholy beauty, knowing well how peace not of this world had come into the homestead.

But outside that, beyond, in the dread forest, a

threat, a menace filled the outer darkness. Fear clutched at my heart, a presentiment told me of evil, of instant danger. Then, as though the horror in the night moved other hearts as well as mine, the Chinese cook came groping his way through the dining-hall and humbly scratched at the door. I let him in and he crept to a stool in the near corner. I whispered to him:

"Are you frightened, Sam?"

"Too plenty much," he quavered, "me flitened bad."

He lighted his pipe and seemed, like me, to be eased by human company. Once only he moved, and in the queerest way came with his long yellow fingers to touch me, then timid, but reassured, crept back to his stool in the corner.

Soon Nurse Panton joined us, her hair in corkscrews, looking very plain, peevish because she had not been called at midnight. "What's the matter?" she asked crossly, and for answer I pulled down the blinds. She shivered as she passed the open door to take a chair behind it. She begged me to close the door, but the night was warm, and besides I dared not. Nurse and Chinaman each had a glass

of port, and so did I, feeling much better afterward.

An hour passed, the Chinaman nodding like those ridiculous mandarin figures with loose heads, the nurse pallid against the gloom, staring until she got on my nerves. I always disliked that woman with her precise routine and large flat feet.

Far off I heard the thud of a gunshot, then three shots all together, and afterward a fifth. The evil in the night was coming nearer, and I said to myself, "If I were really frightened I should close that door. I'm half a coward."

The hero himself had strung his Victoria Cross upon a riband which I wore about my neck. Could I wear the cross and set an example of cowardice to these poor creatures who crouched in the corners of the room? To show fear is a privilege of the underbred. But I did long for Jesse.

Through the murmurs of the nearer rain, I felt a throb in the ground, then heard a sound grow, of a horse galloping. The swift soft rhythm, now loud, now very faint again, then very near, echoed against the barns, thundered across the bridge, splashed through the flooded yard, and ceased abruptly.

Billy had come home from the Falls, he was stabling his roan, he was crossing the yard in haste, his spurs clanked at the door-step and, dreading his news, a sudden panic seized me. I fled behind the bar.

He entered, astream with rain, shading his eyes against the candle-light; then as I moved he called out, as though I were at a distance, begging me for brandy. His face was haggard, his hand as he drank was covered with dried blood, he slammed the glass on the counter so that it broke.

"You heard the shots?" he said.

"At Spite House?" I whispered.

He nodded.

"You were there?" I asked.

"Half a mile beyond. When I got there it was all dark. Looked in through the end window, but the rain got down my neck, so I went round. The front door was standing open. I listened a while. No need to get shot myself. Thought the place was derelict. Then I heard groans.

"Struck a bunch of matches then, found the hall lamp, and got it alight. Wished I'd got a gun, but there wasn't nothing handy except the poker, so I took that and the light—just followed the groans.

He was lying on the barroom floor."

"Brooke?"

"Yes. Shot through the throat, blood spurting down the side of his neck, making a big pool on the oil-cloth. You know the thing you make with a stick and a scarf to twist up? A tourniquet, yes. Well, it choked the swine, so I quit. He whispered something about my thumb hurting the wound, so I told him my father's neck hurt worse.

"Up to that I thought he was just acting, playing pathetic to touch my feelings. Once he muttered your name, and then he was dead."

"Brooke dead!"

"Yes, he'd been shooting Polly, too. I traced her blood tracks all the way to the front door. Hello, what's that? I thought I heard—"

I listened and there was only the sound of the rain.

"I suppose it's all right," said Billy, "we'd better close that door, though."

But before he could reach the door, Nurse Panton called him away to her corner, where she spoke in a whisper so that I should not hear, sending him, perhaps, for her cloak. Meanwhile I came from behind the counter to my former seat before the open

doorway, where I sat staring into the darkness, unable to feel any more, but just benumbed. Across my weariness flickered the mournful soliloquy of a poor barn-door fowl—"Yesterday an egg, to-morrow a feather duster! What's the good of anythin', why, nothin'."

Then I, too, heard a sound in the night, and because Billy and the nurse were muttering, I stood up with the candle-light behind me, trying to see into the darkness. Billy said afterward he had moved quickly, to shut the door, but I waved him back just as the shot rang out.

The explosion blinded, deafened, seemed even to scorch me, while the mirror on the wall came crashing down. Stunned, dazzled, horrified, I felt a dull rage at this attempted murder.

A second revolver-shot stirred my hair, and I'm afraid then that I lost my temper. I am not a fish-fag that I should stoop to fighting a creature such as Polly, but I would have died rather than let her see one trace of fear.

Billy rushed past the firing to reach the door and close it, but I ordered him to desist, then grasped the candle and held it out to show a better light.

"Lower your lights!" I shouted into the dark, "you fired too high!"

A revolver crashed on the door-step, and low down within three feet of the ground, I saw a dreadful face convulsed with rage, changing to fear. The woman was sinking to her knees, she buried her face in grimy, blood-smeared hands, and rocked to and fro in awful abandonment of grief.

The danger was over now, the menace of evil in the night had vanished. I felt an immense relief, with hands wet, mouth parched, knees shaking, and great need of tears. I knew the strain had been beyond endurance, but now it was gone, although a velvet darkness closing round me, black night swinging round me, sickness—I must not faint, when I had to fight, to keep command, to set an example worthy of Jesse's wife. And there I was sitting in my chair, with drops of sweat forming and pouring on my forehead. Billy, groping on the floor at my feet, had found and lighted the candle, and was holding the flame in the palms of his hands till it steadied and blazed up clear. "Buck up, missus," he was saying. "Cheer-oh. Don't let 'em know you swooned, mum. Grab on to that cross, and make it proud of you. That's

right. Laugh, mum! Laugh! Wish'd I'd half yer grit."

I had come to myself and only Billy knew, who was loyal. As the candle blazed up I saw the Chinaman gibbering like some toothless mask of yellow india-rubber, but that nurse still kept up her silly screaming, until I ordered her to shut her mouth, which she did in sheer surprise.

There lay Polly prone across the doorway on her face, racked with convulsive sobs, until feeling, I suppose, the lashing rain on her back, she rose on hands and knees like some forlorn wild animal crawling to shelter, while behind her stretched a trail of wet and blood. I stared until in shame she sat up, still for all the world like an animal lost to human feeling, and to a woman's dignity, until as she looked at me a wan shamed smile seemed to apologize. She sat back then against the log wall, limp, relaxed with weakness.

"Nurse," I called, still with my gaze on Polly, "this woman is wounded. You are a nurse. You claimed to be a nurse."

But Miss Panton indulged in hysterics, so I turned to Billy. "Run into the house, get the hip bath, warm water, blankets, bandages."

"Aye, aye, mum," he touched his forelock, and swinging the Chinaman to his feet: "Come along, Sam," he grunted, and bustled him off on duty.

Polly looked up, trusting me with her tawny bloodshot eyes. Her voice was a dreary hoarseness, demanding liquor. But with an open wound, to quicken the heart's action might be fatal, and Polly knew well it was no use pleading. Instead of that she pointed at the nurse, and said, "Send *that* away."

I turned upon Nurse Panton who sat forsaken and ostentatious in her corner. "Go," I said, "and make beef tea."

Sniff.

I took her by the shoulders, and marched her out of the room, while Polly grinned approval. I came back and asked where she was wounded. She pointed to the left hip, but I dared not remove any clothing which might have caught and sealed the flow of blood. A sole diet of alcohol and months of neglect had made her condition such that I shrank from touching her.

"So you're Kate," she lay against the bottom log of the wall, head back, eyes nearly shut, looking along her nose at me, "Carroty Kate."

Her own tawny hair, draggled, and hung in snakes, was streaked with dirty gray.

"Ye took Jesse," she said in weary scorn, "so I ruined him. Then this Brooke, he fell in love with yer, so I murdered him. Take everything, give nothin'; that's you, Carrots, give nothin'. That's you, Carrots, give nothin' away, not even a drink. And I gave everything.

"So you're good, and I'm bad; you're high-toned society, and I'm a poor sporting lady. Oh, I saw ye lift yer skirt away when yer passed me—calling yerself a Christian, when just one word of Christian kindness would have saved the likes of me.

"Ye needn't look over my head as if I wasn't there. I'm no fairy, I ain't—no dream. I'm facts, and ye'd better face 'em. 'Sisters of Sorrow' they calls us, who gave everything, who gave ourselves.

"And you *good* women pride yerselves in virtue, which ain't been tempted. Your virtue never been outdoors in the rain, gettin' wet. Your virtue never been starved and froze, or fooled and betrayed. Your colors ain't run, 'cause they've never been to the wash. You don't know good from evil, and you set thar judgin' me.

"Tears running down yer face, eh? You think

you struck it rough when you came up agin me. Poor Carrots playin' Christian martyr. I done you good if you know'd it. I'm all the schoolin' you got in real life. I waked ye from dreams to livin'. And you an' me is women, sisters in pain. I wish'd I'd auburn hair like your'n, Kate, and a baby David to favor me with hair an' eyes. And if I'd had a home! But I didn't get a fair show ever, and every time I done good, I got it in the neck. Well, what's the odds?

"It wasn't you brung me down, Kate. Don't cry like that, dear. It don't matter. Nothing matters. It was this Brooke which done for me, not you or Jesse. Brooke's only a thing I took in like a lost dog 'cause he was hungry. He said he'd manage my business, and he shorely did—invested all I'd got in a governess, and a bonfire at Mathson's, and a stampede of mules. Then he fooled a widow down to Ashcroft to start him running a tourist joint, and I was to be turned out. And he fell in love with you.

"I guess that's all, excep' I got to tell you one thing. It was nursing the sick men kep' me straight all them years, kep' me from drink. You see I was

meant for a nurse, trained for a nurse until—until—well, never you mind. Brooke stopped the nursing, and I drank. I'm only a nurse gone wrong.

"Yes, your eyes is wonderin' why they don't come back with them bandages, and the bath. Don't worry about that, 'cause I'll be dead by daybreak. Jesse loved yer. Brooke loved yer, and somehow, well, I'm kinder ranging that way myself. And if I go, you'll get back Jess, eh?"

Rallying what courage I had left, I knelt down and kissed my sister, my poor sister. For a moment I let her stroke my carroty hair, which she liked. Then I ran to hurry my people to bring the beef tea, the hot water, the bandages. I found that wretched nurse detaining Billy and the Chinaman, with some pretense that I must not be disturbed. I was telling her to get out of my sight, to go to her bed, when a revolver-shot rang through the echoing house.

Polly had crawled to the door-step, found her revolver. She who gave everything in life, had given me back to Jesse, and lay dead, her forehead shattered in with the revolver-shot. For some seconds Billy and I hung back, watching from the doorway while a slow coil of smoke unfolded in the wan light

of the dawn. The rain had ceased, and the east was all aglow with golden radiance.

Billy knelt and touched the poor broken forehead, then looking up at me, "This time," he said, "it's real."

EPILOGUE

Once more with Jesse in Cathedral Grove! The breath of evening stirred its tangled coral, the long needles clustered in globes were swaying as censors sway, with heavy incense. Beyond the purple night swept up over glowing cliffs to where the upper forest like an edge of flame burned against deeps of sky.

"Come to the hilltop: blackbird choristers
Peal their clear anthem to the kneeling gorse."

Jesse lay dreaming while I sang to him. Crisp silvered hair, and the deeply graven lines of his dear face, gave him at rest a sweet sad dignity; but presently he would look up, his big mouth humorous, his eyes alight with fun, a man of commanding power matured in wisdom, in sympathy, and valor to lead his fellows.

Through the east window of the grove, I could see a little procession of my closest friends pass on their Sunday stroll. First came Pete, ill at ease in

his Sabbath suit of blacks, and with him, arm in arm, was Mrs. Pete in silk, full-skirted, prickly, and so very grim. Then Billy passed slowly by, his mother stumping beside him, bound to keep the pace. They had the new rabbit with them, collared and chained like a bulldog, and were followed by David's nurse, dear Patsy, Billy's wife—plucking my young anemones—the wretch!

Out on the perilous edge of Apex Rock I could see young Mr. Nisted, Father Jared's nephew, a pupil in Jesse's school of colonial training. With rod and line he was seriously fishing—for birds!

"Don't you reckon," said Jesse, relighting a stale cigar, "that it's time we stopped our book?"

"Oh, but—"

"It's tempting Providence, young woman; it's encouraging the police. From the moment you started the thing, we've had more'n our share of adventures. Put up a notice, 'Book Closed. No more adventurers need apply. Try Surly Brown for a change.'"

"But what shall we do?"

"Publish the blamed thing, and serves it right. Throw it to the critics."

"But it's all secrets!"

"Change the names and places. We'll be 'Mr. and Mrs. Smith,' well-meaning private persons located somewhere west. I'm going to have blue eyes."

"But mine *are* blue."

"I made first grab. You can have green, and a large mouth, and your Christian name is Carrots. Hello, here's Baby David."

My son was coming through the scented dusk, and in his arms he carried a large dog, a china dog with gilt muzzle, split from nose to tail, but carefully mended.

"Sonny," said Jesse, "don't you drop Maria, or she'll have puppies."

"I did, and she didn't; so there! Something dropped out, though. See, mummie."

David had thrown Maria into my lap, and danced about in the gloaming with some strange trophy, the tail of a large animal.

"Sort of reminds me," said Jesse, "of being a little boy. That's the Inspector's tale. This is a long way, too, from the Labrador."

The wind made quite a disturbance, telling the pines to hush, while both my son and Jesse wanted to play with the wolf tail, and would not be quiet,

though already the stars and the fireflies had lighted Cathedral Grove, and the great river like an organ crooned the first deep notes of nature's evensong. An awed expectant silence came to us.

"Lighten our darkness," said the grave old trees, "we beseech Thee."

"By Thy great mercy," pleaded the little flowers.

"Defend us from all perils," the small birds twittered.

"And dangers of the night," the aspens quavered.

"For the love of Thy only Son," cried the South Wind.

"Our Saviour Jesus Christ," a woman's voice responded.

"Amen," the cliffs were breathing.

"Amen," the high clouds echoed.

"Amen," said the organ river.

And from the reverent woodlands came:

"Amen. Amen."

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